LOVING MONSTERS

BEAUTY AND HER MONSTERS

BOOK TWO

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Loving Monsters

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Chapter One

Belle

Black. Empty. Lifeless. That's life in the Abyss. The place of nightmares. I can no longer feel my fingers and toes; I'm not sure if I'm even still alive. I've lost my sense of self, and it truly is depressing.

The enchantress did warn me, after all. She told me that the Abyss is no place for human beings and that many simply perish who are unfortunate enough to find themselves stuck there.

But I've always been a rebellious spirit. When someone tells me that I can't do something, then it's like a spark has been ignited inside me, and then I go and do the complete opposite of what I'm told. It sounds like self-sabotage, but I don't care. I have to see my monsters. I would crawl to the ends of the earth if it meant that I could glimpse them once again.

We were only together for a short time, but it felt like a lifetime.

I try to see through the murk around me, but it's too dark. So I stretch out my fingers, hoping to make contact with something. Anything would be better than nothing. The tip of my boot catches on a rock, and I tumble forward.

I face-plant the ground, tasting dirt, and finally, the first sign of life. I spit the mud out and peer around. My surroundings come into focus, but everything is still blurred. But there's no mistaking the silhouettes of trees.

I'm inside a forest.

Climbing back to my feet, I wipe down my jeans, glancing back the way I came. I'm greeted with a wall of shadow. It appears I got through the first hurdle. Miles and miles of black, empty nothingness have led me to this point. So if I've made it this far, then I can go further.

I hold my rifle ready, continuing my way through the forest again. Twigs crunch beneath my feet, the first sound I've heard ever since I said goodbye to my father. That feels like a thousand years ago, and

it truly is disorientating. I'm not sure how time works here, but I'm determined to find my monsters and save the human world.

I always thought that the shadows would disappear the moment the monsters left, and then all our problems would be solved. But it appeared the problem had been humanity all along. The monsters were just mere by-products of our ugliness. Our toxic ways finally caught up with us in the end, and now the human world has plunged into darkness.

And it's up to *me* to save us all.

Falling in love with the monsters was just my first test. Now I have to find a way to rid the world of the darkness. Should be easy.

A squeal echoes through the woods, and I jerk, aiming my gun. I only have so many bullets, so I need to use them wisely. I can't go shooting at every little noise.

Another screech and now my body shakes when I remember the shadow wolves that chased me when I escaped the castle.

It's okay, Belle. You got this. You're no damsel in distress. You can fight any adversary with pride.

Something whizzes through the trees, and I know my eyes aren't playing tricks on me anymore. I *am* being pursued. Fuck whatever creature has decided to make prey out of me. I will blast it between the eyes.

Nothing happens at first. A silent breeze wafts through the trees, bringing the scent of bacon grease.

Bacon grease? Odd.

Another breeze, and now I get the scent of burned porridge, fighting the urge to vomit. It's enough to make my eyes water.

Why am I getting random food smells? Sure, they're not pleasant, but it doesn't make sense. Although I'm probably not going to be able to remove the smell of bacon grease from my hair for a while.

Shit. The smell of burned porridge grows stronger, almost blinding me now, and this just isn't fair. They could have thrown the scent of shit my way, or rotten garbage. But they had to pick the sickly sweet scent of burning oats.

I bet they're all stuck on the bottom of the pan too. Ugh!

It's just too much. It appears this creature of nightmares has gotten the best of me. I'd take the stench of wet dog over this stink.

Finally, something materializes through the bushes, and I gaze up through a shroud of tears. It's a little girl. A creepy little girl with soulless eyes and hanging sheets of black hair, and I stagger.

Shit, shit, shit.

I've always hated creepy little ghost children. As a kid, I watched the movie *The Ring* where she climbs out of the TV, and for weeks after I imagined her standing at the end of my bed, watching me through her dark sheets of hair.

And now she is here.

Also, she looks a lot like the girl who used to bully me back on my old playground, and I was terrified of her. I was six and she was eight, so obviously, she was bigger and more intimidating than me.

The little girl keeps staring, smelling of burned porridge, and finally, I shoot. The bullet hits her between the eyes, but she barely budges, her black pits of eyes never leaving me. It's like someone gouged them from her sockets, yet she still continues to stare, stare, stare, and I'd do anything to make her stop.

This place will destroy me.

I stumble, landing on something sticky, and I'm trapped. That's when I glance left and right and find that I'm stuck on a spider web. The arachnid in question whizzes down on its thread, baring a long pair of mandibles.

I was never afraid of spiders, but I change my mind the moment I see this nightmare. Couple that with the helpless feeling of being trapped, and I'm crying like a little girl.

It's too late for me. Even if the things can't hurt me, they'll still destroy me, bringing my worst fear to light. I already failed, and that right there is the one thing I fear the most. I failed to reunite with my monsters, and I failed to save the human world. All because I caved to the creatures of this land.

The creatures creep in on me, and I slam my eyes shut. I don't want to see the moment they eat me alive. I just want to die peacefully. No wonder no one returns from the Abyss.

It truly is the land of nightmares. The place where happiness and dreams die.

There comes the sound of tearing flesh. Then a loud, guttural squeal rents the air, piercing my eardrums, and finally, I lose consciousness.

Maybe it was for the best that I blacked out.

At least then I won't be awake when the things eat me.

Chapter Two

Enzo

I yank the sword from the wraith's chest, smirking as it writhes on the ground at my feet. Black blood seeps from its gash as it takes its true form at last, and now the chilling image of a haunting little child vanishes forever.

The little bitch preyed on my mate. I will destroy her.

She's just some low-level wraith. They're found at the edges of the Abyss, just a few miles from the human world.

All portals to our realm open along the fringes. So that is why the wraiths linger here. It's the reason many humans don't survive.

The wraiths will assume a form that the human finds most terrifying. They will look right into the person's essence, finding everything that scares them all the way back to childhood, and it appears my little bell was afraid of demonic little girls with black pits for eyes.

I'll admit, she was a scary one. I wouldn't want that thing staring at me from the foot of my bed at night, but it's just an illusion.

She's not a terrifying little girl anymore, but a thin, skeletal wisp with no features. It's quite often that many wraiths will hold onto their assumed forms, even long after they've finished with their human prey.

That explains why I am peering into the eight eyes of a giant tarantula. Belle never struck me as the girl who feared creepy crawlies, but spiders are a common fear with deep roots in human evolution, dating back to the days when they were still living in trees and covered in hair like an ape.

That's why there are a few large predators around.

I spy a lion and a wolf snarling at me in the shadows, deeming whether I am worth the risk of a fight. A Rottweiler with froth around its mouth releases a low growl, and the hair rises at the back of

my neck.

I'm not sure why a small tabby crawls out from the bushes and rubs against my legs, but I suppose humans can be scared of cats too. There are hundreds of mice and rats, and a flock of buzzards watching me silently in the trees.

But some wraiths will go a little further.

A psychotic clown and a masked serial killer gaze out from behind a tree, and I can see *Hollywood* has had a major part to play in a lot of human fears in this modern-day age.

There's also a woman with all her teeth falling out, and a man lying dead on the ground. I don't know who they are, but I imagine they were humans who got lost here. The wraiths just never bothered to change their forms after they were finished with them.

A little lazy, if you ask me, but it doesn't matter. They can't hurt Belle anymore. I'm here to rescue her.

I chase the spider away as I set my mate free from its web, and now I carry her back to our hideout.

My brothers will be so happy to see her.

It's been a hundred years after all.

***

The moment I lay Belle down on the cot of our rundown cabin, taking a step back, I'm struck by her beauty.

I forgot how lovely she was, and I just wasn't prepared. Even with a worry line etched between her brows, she's still the most beautiful woman I have ever laid eyes on.

She hasn't changed. Only a few months would have passed in the human world, but it's been too long for me and my brothers.

Way too long.

I haven't felt the warmth of a woman's skin in over a century.

I stand above her bed and watch as she sleeps. Her chest rises gently back and forth, and she appears to be at rest.

I don't want that wraith to ever feature in her nightmares again. Nothing will harm her while she's in our realm. Absolutely nothing.

It's just the two of us at the moment. Nero went out hunting with Madoc and Grey, which is a first. Normally, he'd be in the cabin reshuffling furniture around, and his cleaning has only increased since we left Belle in the human world.

I still can't believe she risked her life to come and find us. I imagine old Monty was of some help in that department, and my heart lifts with hope.

We were too afraid to go back for her just in case we brought the darkness back with us. Hopefully, in our absence, light has returned to the human world.

It would be selfish if we ever tried to go back just so we could be with our mate.

However, her presence here doesn't make much sense. If the human world was restored, then why is she here? If she were truly happy, would she have bothered to risk her life and come to the Abyss?

Unless the darkness never left.

Belle stirs and my cock jolts at the sound of her sleepy moan. I could listen to that sound on repeat for hours.

Every little thing she does is so sexual, I don't know how any man could keep their hands to themselves when they're near her. Not that I'm giving them an invitation.

I was never as territorial as my brothers, but I will ruin any male who so much as gives her the googly eyes. Well, any male who isn't one of my brothers.

I'm tempted to reach across and stroke her cheek with the back of my finger, but I don't want to rouse her.

That wraith really took a lot from her. They feed off energy, just like parasites.

They *are* parasites in this world, but there are far worse creatures. And that is why I am so glad that I found her.

Thank God we live along the fringes. If we had still been living in the castle, then Belle would have perished like the poor woman whose worst fear in the world was losing all her teeth.

Humans truly can be vain at times.

Her eyes flutter next, and finally, I get a glimpse of those beautiful hazel irises. My heart beats twice as fast.

One hundred years it has been since I last gazed into those spheres of hazel.

Her eyes snap open, and she jolts upright on the cot, jerking her head around. Heavy gasps escape her sweet lips, and I nestle down on the bed to calm her pounding heart.

It's beating so loud; I can hear it from several feet away.

"Belle... it's okay. It's me, Enzo."

She gasps, whirling around to face me, and her eyes settle in my general direction. Her eyes won't have adjusted to the darkness of our realm yet, so I give her a moment.

"E-Enzo..." she whispers.

I smile, even though she can't see. "Yes."

Her lip wobbles, and now she reaches out and grabs my hand, squeezing it tight. A tear rolls down her cheek and I lean across to wipe it from her smooth skin.

I don't want her cheeks stained with tears.

"Finally... I've found you..."

A deep chuckle echoes in my chest. "You have. I'm so proud of you, little bell. Not many humans would be brave enough to enter the Abyss alone. You're a true testament to your—"

She takes my breath away when she throws her whole body at me, completely trusting that I will capture her in my arms, and now she helps herself to my lips.

I will be nothing more than a shadowy silhouette to her in the Abyss, but she still finds the strength to kiss me. I wrap my arms around her, enveloping her in my warmth, and that's how we remain.

She moves her tongue deftly between my lips, running it around the sharp edges of my fangs, and I growl in response, nipping her lower lip. She arches her spine, pressing her breasts against my chest.

Her nipples are hard. I can feel her sex throbbing between her legs as I slowly reach down, teasing my claw along the seam of her denim pants.

She shudders when I flick the button next, and I think it's about time the jeans came off.

We will get her some new clothes. Clothes fit for a queen.

The button comes loose, and now I pull her zipper down, finding her damp cotton panties.

A low rumble vibrates in my chest when the scent of her arousal soaks my nostrils. Belle keeps her lips against mine as I tear a hole through her
panties, and her heart beats faster.

We will get her some new underwear too. That shouldn't be a problem. We've actually been collecting clothes for her over the last century just in case she ever returned.

We had to hold on to some hope that she would come back to us. There's no other woman like Belle after all. No human female would ever dare to be so bold and enter a place virtually founded by human nightmares.

Ever since humans first learned to dream, we've been here, creatures found only in the dark of night, and it was how our world was formed.

If it weren't for humans, we wouldn't exist.

It's the overactive imagination of the human being that fuels our world and gives it life. Hence why time moves so much faster in the Abyss. With humans constantly dreaming and creating new nightmares, well, the faster we evolve.

It has just gotten to the point where the darkness has become too much, even for us.

All those toxic human emotions are seeping into the atmosphere like a greenhouse gas, clogging up both universes, and it's creating an imbalance.

But enough of that conundrum. We have time to worry about the potential collapse of the universes later.

Right now, I am going to pleasure this beautiful woman and watch how she shatters around my claw.

Madoc tells me she likes claws. And tongues too.

I'm no longer the same gentleman anymore, and I'm going to take her to heights that my insane brother could only dream of.

I graze the tip of my claw around her swollen clitoris, swallowing the sounds that escape her mouth.

She tastes like pure sin.

We now share breath as she pumps hot air into my lungs, giving my body life, and I savor every moment.

Wrapping my fingers through her long, brown hair, I tip her head back and watch the expressions that form over her beautiful face. I slide inside of her, curling my finger until the tip of my claw tickles that delightful bundle of nerves, and finally, she comes apart.

Her mouth forms an 'O' as she clenches around my thick finger, her eyes shuttering closed, and now she careens right over the edge and into the abyss.

But I got her. No creature or man will ever harm her again.

She's all mine. Mine to protect.

My mate.

Chapter Three

Belle

I must have fallen back asleep at some point. The last thing I recall was Enzo cradling me in his arms, whispering sweet nothings into my ear about how he would keep me safe and that no nightmarish creatures would ever get to me again, and just like that my fears evaporated.

The chilling face of the creepy little girl no longer fills my dreams, and now all I see are all four of my monsters, worshiping my body as if I was the goddess that was promised to them.

In my dreams, I'm sitting on Madoc's lap, getting finger fucked by his sharp claw. Madoc runs his long, forked tongue up the length of my back, creating a delightful shiver up my spine. Grey shadows us all with the wide span of his wings, his claw teasing at my back entrance, while Nero watches.

He can watch all he wants, I don't mind. He can watch until he's blue in the balls, so long as he's willing to get in on the action at some point too.

Voices echo in the distance, making me stir, but I don't want to wake from these pleasant dreams just yet.

There will only be a world of nightmares and trouble waiting for me the moment I wake, so I will stay in my blissful dreams a little while longer.

"She's dreaming about us..." The sentence ends with a creepy psychotic giggle.

Madoc. How I've missed that disturbed bastard.

Someone answers with a grumble. "You pervert."

Grey. The miserable grouch. I've missed his sour mug, too.

Madoc cackles again, and I refrain from rolling my eyes. By this point, I'm pretty much awake, but I'm going to pretend to be asleep for a little while longer.

Besides, it's not as if I will be able to see them. Enzo was nothing but a horned silhouette, not unlike the time when he lived in the human world, and I was his prisoner.

"You guys know she's awake, right?"

And finally, Nero. My heart does an involuntary lurch. The last time I saw him, he had been dying. Luckily, the enchantress froze time and removed the bullets.

I take it by the neutral sound of his voice that he's healed. It has been a few months, but for all I know, a hundred years could have passed in the Abyss.

Time moves a little faster here. That was what my father explained before I departed. I just hope I don't age in the time I spend here.

It was a risk I was willing to take. I don't care if I die tomorrow of old age, so long as I get to spend my last moments with my monsters.

But dying would really put a damper on my plans to save humanity, so I need to stay alive for as long as I can.

Heaving a sigh, I lean up at last and face the direction of their voices. They're just shadows to me, and my heart sinks as I yearn to see the face of my crazy flamed-haired bastard Madoc. I'd love to see Grey's miserable, stony expression too, and Nero's neural features.

And don't forget Enzo's regal lion-like visage.

That reminds me...

Are we at their castle? I can't see much, but the old threadbare sheets of the cot beneath me hardly match the silken quilts one would expect of four kings.

How did they find me all the way at the border of their realm? I thought the castle was at the heart of the Abyss.

A quiet settles over the room. No one breathes a sound. I think my monsters are just so happy to see me again. I've left them speechless.

I'm elated to see them too. Well, their silhouettes.

"My beauty..."

Madoc is the first to break the silence, and now he steps toward me, sinking down on the mattress. It groans under his weight.

He wraps a hand around my cheek, and I caress his palm like a cat getting its head rubbed by its owner. I think I even purr.

How I've missed that maniac's soft touch. For one so demented, he really can be sweet. Sweet and psycho.

It's enough to give one a headache.

He leans closer, and now all that softness melts away as he growls into my ear, his breath as hot as his flaming touch.

"I promise, my beauty... I'm going to fuck you so hard later, you'll be seeing the whole universe."

My breath whooshes from my lips. "I'm looking forward to it, psychopath."

Madoc rumbles, and the sound shoots straight to my pussy. Heat pools in my jeans, and it's about time I got some new clothes.

Enzo ripped my underwear earlier.

The monster flicks his tongue out and the forked tip tickles my inner ear. A shudder works its way up my spine.

I want that forked tip tickling my clitoris later.

Grey approaches the bed now, shoving his psychotic brother to one side since there's only room for one monster on my tiny cot.

Seriously, I thought they were kings. I expected a king-sized bed or at least a queen-sized one.

Not that I'm complaining. I don't want them for their riches. But their love.

"Miss us, sunshine?" Grey rumbles, and I smirk at his narrowed green eyes.

"Just a little," I lie. I missed them *a lot*. "I even missed that miserable face of yours, Grey."

He sniggers, and now he wraps a hand around my head, bumping his stone-hard mouth against my lips in a bruising kiss.

The monster cocoons us with his leathery wings, creating our own private world that the others can't see, and I even hear Madoc hiss in jealousy.

"Show off..." he gripes, and Grey flips him the middle finger.

I bet he learned that gesture during his time in the human world. I know I wanted to flip him the bird several times.

Grey withdraws his wings, and now he steps off the bed. All that's left is Nero. He leans in the corner of the room, and all I see

are his bright violet eyes.

They look at everything but me.

"Hey, Belle... long-time no see."

I smile. I don't expect him to come to me now. He can come in his own time.

"Hi, Nero. I'm so glad you're all right."

The four of them rouse, and there's no missing the confusion that shimmers inside their glowing eyes.

“Whatever do you mean, little bell?” Enzo asks.

It takes me a moment to respond, but surely they couldn’t have forgotten what happened to Nero. Gustave shot him.

“The last time I saw Nero, he was hurt.”

Each monster watches me spellbound for a few moments. Then Nero sighs, peeling his back away from the wall. “She’s talking about the time that human clown shot me.”

Enzo nods. “Ah, yes. Please forgive us, Belle. We know that memory will be pretty recent for you, but for us, that night happened over a century ago.”

Over a century ago? So my father was right. Of *course* he was right. He’s a genius, but it’s still no less surprising.

My monsters have been pining for me for one hundred years while I only had to yearn for a few months.

And I thought I was suffering. My poor monsters. If only I had tried to come sooner, then maybe fifty years would have passed instead of a hundred. Hell, no, ten.

I can’t feel guilty now. Father and I had to plan for months. It took us weeks to even procure the solar-paneled car.

Plus, humans are getting restless. They’re going rogue as the darkness is starting to get to them. We had to avoid being attacked on the road as we made the trip to the old university.

Still, it doesn’t matter. It’s a miracle that I even made it this far into the Abyss.

“So, your wounds have healed by now, I suppose?” I say to no one in particular.

Nero shifts on his feet uncomfortably. “Yeah. I’m over it.”

I don’t know how someone can be over being shot, but so long as he’s healthy again.

I glance around the room, trying to make out the walls, but they’re still shadowed. “Where are we exactly? This can’t be your castle, right?”

Each monster stills at my words and I peer up. “What?”

The others look at Enzo, their leader and head king, and now the monster settles his oranges eyes on me. Nothing but regret gazes back at me, and already I know what he’s going to say.

“Belle... we are no longer kings. We were overthrown by our uncle not long after we returned. Our subjects lost trust in us, and as a result, we were banished to live at the fringes of the Abyss. That was why I was able to find you. I sensed you the moment you stepped into the wraith forest. I’m... sorry...”

He’s sorry? He has no reason to apologize.

It does pose a problem, though. If they had still been in a position of power, then they may have been able to help me rid the darkness from the human world. But now their uncle has taken over.

Shit.

I guess finding my way to them was just the beginning of my hurdles.

My troubles aren't over just yet.

Chapter Four

Madoc

Finally. My beauty has returned to me. Now I no longer have to pine for her. She's mine all over again.

I haven't been myself since we last saw her. Even when our fucking uncle stole our thrones, I didn't care. I was too numb, too heartbroken to even fathom what was happening.

Which was probably why we lost. I'm the best fighter of all my brothers, but I know they were heartbroken too. Even Nero, even though he likes to pretend that he doesn't care about our mate.

It was just so easy for our uncle to turn our whole court against us and seize our thrones. We'd all lost the will to live.

But now she is here again, and I can rejoice. I even felt a little of my old spark return. It has definitely returned to my dick, that's for sure.

I'm going to fuck her brains out. When we finally get a moment alone.

Besides, it's my turn to guard the house. We all work in rotation. Three of us will hunt wraiths while one of us remains at the cabin.

No doubt some wraith or two will try and steal the one thing we have left in the world. Life at the edge of the Abyss isn't pleasant. But I'm loving the proximity to the human world.

So many humans dare to peer over the edge of the Abyss, staring into its deep, dark waters. There was that one guy with a gun to his head, and he had been so close to pulling the trigger.

I could taste his misery and despair on my lizard tongue. Normally, I would enjoy such a delicious meal, but I couldn't help but feel sad for the human.

He looked so lost, tears streaming from his bloodshot eyes, and I knew he didn't really want to pull that trigger. He just felt like there was no other way to escape the darkness.

The human world has literally been plunged into darkness. So more and more humans are tottering over that dangerous knife's edge.

The Abyss is calling to them every day, and unbeknownst to my brothers, I've been convincing the humans not to join our realm. Well, in my own special way.

As they call onto the darkness, peering over that precipice into the void, there they will find me, smiling and waving up at them like an old friend.

One look into my crazy red eyes convinces them to keep fighting for a little while longer.

Besides, things can always get better. It's good to hold on to hope, right?

Belle will be so happy.

She's the reason why I helped those humans. Sure, I'm insane, and I feed off negative emotions, but I suppose a monster can change in a hundred years.

I hold her close as we lay side by side on the tiny cot. I wish we could give her riches just like we could in our former lives as kings. Hell, even when we were stuck in the human world, but I know my Belle wouldn't have it any other way.

She's just happy to be with us again, and that's what I love so much about her. So humble, so brave, and so strong.

She risked her life just to be with us again, falling victim to a wraith as result. I'm glad Enzo killed it. If he hadn't, then I would have dished out my own personal justice.

I'd have ripped its own diaphragm open, then made it feast on its own organs, but that's just me. Totally *crazy*.

Belle stirs in my arms, and her bubble-shaped ass rubs against my dick. I growl and hug her closer.

Mine, all mine. No one else's. Screw my brothers. Grey especially.

"You're thinking of something creepy again, aren't you?"

"How can you tell, my beauty?" I purr, inhaling the rose-petal scent of her hair.

She stills. "Your dick just went hard. I thought you pulled a knife on me for a moment."

I giggle and she shudders in delight. I know she likes it when I make that psychotic sound.

"Would you like it if I *really* pulled a knife on you?"

Belle gasps and then her heart beats faster. I knew it. She's into knives.

Her body heats up and a groan escapes her lips. I guess that's a *yes*, then.

She yelps when I roll her onto her back, and now I swallow up her little form as I pull out one of my knives, placing it at her delicate pulse.

Belle doesn't take her eyes off me. Her breath pumps from her lips as her pupils blow twice their size, and it seems she really does want me to play with her.

I suppose she's not as sweet and innocent as she looks.

It's been too long. I'd do anything to claim her pussy again, but I promised my brothers that I would wait.

But I didn't hear them say that we couldn't have a little knife foreplay.

I'm the only one who would be daring to go this far with her. The others are too... what's the word? Normal. Yes, normal.

I was always the fun one. *Grey eat your heart out.*

I run the knife down her throat, and Belle closes her eyes. Her nipples pebble beneath her old shirt as goosebumps spread across her skin.

Now I run the knife over her shirt, splitting it right in the middle like I'm about to perform open-heart surgery, and she squirms beneath my grip.

Sweat shines on her beautiful face, gathering on her upper lip, but her eyes remain closed. I can almost see the lights flashing behind them as she races toward her peak, falling into a different kind of abyss.

One filled with wonders and pleasures.

Her shirt rips open and now the fabric falls away to reveal her full, round breasts. I lick my lips, salvia dripping down my chin. It's as if the last one hundred years have all been forgotten. One look at those taut pink nipples, and I lose all self-control.

But when did I have any to begin with?

I flick my tongue out, covering her in my scent, and I smirk as my spittle drips from her breasts. I'm marking my territory. I have scent glands on my tongue. Anything I lick becomes *mine.*

Take that, Grey, you winged asshole.

I lean over and take one of her breasts in my mouth, and Belle squeals when my teeth puncture the flesh. A tiny bit of blood escapes the wound, but I lick it away, kissing her tenderly.

Sweet and rough. I can be that for her.

I pepper more kisses down her abdomen, licking the sweat from her skin with my tongue, and she tastes like cinnamon.

I almost forget about the knife in my hand, which isn't like me. It's as if she makes me less insane. Less of a monster.

Once I reach the button of her jeans, I grab the knife and rip it off. It flies somewhere to my right, tapping along the floor, and I could kiss Enzo for ripping her panties earlier.

Now I don't have to deal with an extra layer of fabric.

My beauty's wet pussy is on full display.

All the breath leaves my lungs as I stare at that beautiful flesh between her legs. It splays out like the petals of a rose, and I've never seen anything so... so...

There are no words.

I almost don't want to taint that pretty little rose with my knife. Sure, I've done worse things between those legs of hers, but that was a hundred years ago.

I'm not the same monster.

Still, my beauty wants my knife, so I will give it to her. Hard.

Flipping the blade around, I press the handle against her opening, and she bucks her hips.

"Fuck... d-don't stop..."

Well, if she insists.

So further in I go until I bury my knife all the way to the hilt and holy shit. I'm fucking her with steel.

It's the single most beautiful thing I have ever seen.

The blade of my knife extends between her legs, and I can't help it anymore. I need to come.

Freeing my dick from the prison that is my pants, I run my hand up and down my grooved length, never taking my eyes off my beauty. Belle writhes beneath me, enjoying the hardness of my knife's handle, and I never thought I would be jealous of a blade.

Stupid blade. I hate it almost as much as I hate that winged fucker, Grey.

I finally climax and now rainbows explode in my eyes as I cum all over her perfect body. It coats her breasts and her stomach, and before long she reaches her own crest.

She throws her head back and cries out her pleasure. I watch spellbound as she shatters apart on the cot, a knife sticking out from her pussy, and all I can think about is putting *babies* inside of her.

My mate.

When she falls down from her high, she opens her eyes, and I meet those hazel irises. Her full lips part as she tries to catch her breath and now everything vanishes around me as she becomes my sole focus.

"You... really are a psychopath..."

I blink, cocking my head to one side. Then my mouth stretches into a wide shark tooth grin, and it looks like I've gone back to *crazy-town* (a land filled with cute pink bunnies and fluffy clouds).

"Only when I'm with you, my beauty..."

A teasing smirk curves her lips, and I want to cum in her mouth. Grey will be so pissed when he smells me all over her when he returns later.

Unfortunately, our moment's ruined next when a loud scream echoes through the void, and Belle shoots straight off the cot like a startled cat.

Fuck. It looks like another human has fallen into the Abyss.

Time to save them.

Chapter Five

Belle

The scream rattles me to my core, and the lizard part of my brain tells me to stop. Don't move. Danger is imminent.

That scream. I've never heard anything like it. It's like a mix between the mating call of a vixen and the screeching wheels of a train, and someone is in great distress. A person, like me, and I have to set them free.

They will not succumb to the wraiths.

Madoc startles when I jump upright, my breasts swinging free and loose, and that's right. He cut my shirt with a knife, but I don't have time to dwell or to dress.

Someone is in trouble and they need me.

I don't even have a bra and panties. I truly am exposed and vulnerable, but every moment I spend wishing for clothes, then another human is lost to the Abyss.

"We have to help them."

Madoc doesn't protest. He just sees the determination in my eyes and nods, and now we both run outside to help the human.

Everything is murky. I still have trouble seeing through the darkness of the Abyss, so I have no choice but to follow Madoc. His glowing red eyes are the only light I have.

We rush through the trees of the wraith forest as fast as we can. Well, as fast as I can. I'm the one slowing Madoc down, but he doesn't want to risk leaving me behind.

I know I'm his priority, but I would rather he saw to the human. Who knows what those wraiths are doing to that poor soul.

A form materializes up ahead, and my stomach flops to the ground when we finally reach the human.

It's a woman. No, a girl. Teenage, and she's surrounded by a group of kids her own age.

No, not kids. Wraiths.

They're kicking her around, laughing and mocking her, and I ball my fists.

Fucking bullies.

The wraiths have got her right where they want her. They showed me one of my past tormentors too, a little girl I had forgotten all about, but her mean taunts still echo even after all these years.

I think that was how I started seeing the apparition of the ghost girl at the end of my bed. If it wasn't the character from *The Ring* that scared the shit out of me, then it was Susie Mackenzie; the nastiest piece of shit I have ever met.

Humans really are monsters.

Madoc watches me speechless as I approach the wraiths stark-naked, and each kid glances at me. There are three girls and three boys, and one of the boys records the poor girl on his phone; I will rip that phone from his hand and shove it up his rectum. The girls give me a once-over with their critical eyes, bringing back insecurities of my own teenage years.

Fuck. Teenage girls. So petty.

"Step away from her."

My voice is firm, unwavering, and I have no idea where this strength comes from. One of these creatures almost got to me yesterday, yet here I am in my birthday suit, facing off a bunch of similar nightmares.

Other wraiths peer through the trees. There's a masked serial killer who looks like some Michael Myers rip-off and don't forget about Pennywise the clown too. He even has a balloon.

A large majority of wraiths are animals, such as lions, bears, and tigers, but none of them have anything on this pack of bullies.

One of the girls steps forward, a pretty blonde with a nasty smirk, and I take it she's the leader. "Yeah? What are you going to do about it, bitch?"

Her face starts to resemble a mean girl who I went to high school with next. She'd ripped a book from my fingers and tore out its pages, but bullies all start to look the same after a while.

It makes no difference who she is. I'll beat her either way.

I give her a smirk of my own. "This."

The wraiths jump back when I send a roundhouse kick their leader's way, and she returns to her former form once she hits the ground.

Madoc cheers me on. "That's my beauty! Show that bitch who's boss!"

The creature no longer resembles a blonde teen. Now it looks like a cross between a skeleton and a withered tree branch, and I'm not surprised they need our nightmares.

They're nothing without us. True parasites. Yet there is no symbiosis here. The host had nothing to gain from these creatures, and I will destroy them all.

I don't need a gun *or* a weapon. My legs and fists will do just fine. And courage. Don't forget good old courage.

"I said leave her alone."

I stare into the wraith's beady black eyes, and it starts to shrink. The other wraiths step away from me, and the ones who hide in the trees back off too.

The one on the ground scrambles to its feet and scampers off. But then Madoc throws a knife, and it embeds in the back of the wraith's skull.

The wraith drops to the ground and disappears into a cloud of smoke, and it's a message for the others.

Don't fuck with me and my monsters. And that goes for any human who's unfortunate enough to find themselves in the Abyss.

I gaze down at the girl. She's crouched on the ground in a fetal position, and I kneel down beside her, placing a gentle hand on her shoulder.

I try to channel my mom when she used to soothe me as a kid, and I guess her spirit does live on inside me.

Wherever she is, I hope she's somewhere better than here. I have to believe there is more to the human world and the Abyss. A place free from nightmares.

"Hey, it's okay. They're gone now."

The girl freezes, gazing up with round blue eyes. I remember that color well. That was the shade the sky used to be before the darkness took over.

Hope blinks back up at me now as she stares at me spellbound. "You... you're a..."

I smile. "Yeah. I'm human, like you."

Her sky blue eyes widen in shock, and I have to swallow a lump. The color truly does take your breath away. So luminous.

"And... you survived those *things*?" she asks shakily.

I stifle a snort. I've survived many things. Just before, a creature of this very land was fucking me with his knife, but I will keep that to myself.

"Not at first, but my friends helped me. But now I'm here to help you."

By *friends,* I mean monsters. And by monsters, I mean lovers.

Tears fill her eyes at the word *friend.* I bet it's been a while since she had a good friend to rely on. Sure, she's a few years younger than me, about sixteen maybe, but I suppose I can adopt her.

I always wanted a sister.

"What's your name?" I ask.

She brushes her long golden hair out of her eyes. "A-Alice..."

Alice? Well, it looks like she fell down the Rabbit Hole indeed. Except this is no Wonderland she has found herself in, but a place of nightmares.

"How did you get here?"

Alice sighs and those blue eyes startle me yet again. It really is like looking at the sky. "I don't know... I was at home. My parents were arguing, and I was sitting in my room. It was all getting too much. The darkness, the bullying, and... I just shut down. I can't explain it. Then I woke up here."

Madoc makes a humming sound, and Alice whirls her head in his direction. "Who's that?"

I stop Alice before she has a chance to look at him, and I don't think she's quite ready to gaze upon all that crazy yet.

"It's no one," I lie, flicking my fingers at Madoc. He needs to hide ASAP. I think I can make it back to the cabin on my own. I'm starting to see a little better since helping Alice.

Soon I won't even need my monsters. I can kick ass on my own.

Alice takes a hard look at me again, and her eyes bug in horror. "You're naked."

I am. My monsters tore my clothes. So they better get me new ones.

At least Alice has all her clothes. She dresses like a typical teen with the brightly colored Chuck Taylors, and I adore her blue pinafore and black headband with the bow.

"I know. I... I can explain later..."

Madoc makes an obnoxious giggling sound, and Alice jumps to her feet, jerking her head around. Her blue eyes expand the moment they find my monster, and now her scream splits the air in half.

I scowl at Madoc. He grins like the Cheshire Cat, and I really wish for Alice's sake that he *was* just some psychotic cat with a half-moon smile.

Finally, she passes out from the shock of seeing Madoc, and I guess we have no choice but to take her back with us.

I think it's about time we sought an audience with the king.

We need all the help we can get. Or this madness will only continue.

Chapter Six

Grey

Darn that fucking Madoc bringing home *strays* again.

Except the stray he brought home this time wasn't a demonic puppy, but a blonde, teenage human who fell down the wrong rabbit hole.

He wasn't able to help the other humans we've stumbled upon so far, so he's making up for all his past mistakes. For the past one hundred years— several months in the human world—humans have been losing themselves to the Abyss. They give in to the darkness and surrender, and there is nothing we can do for them.

Madoc appears to have developed a conscience for humans now, and it's all thanks to Belle. She truly has tamed the beast in all of us.

Even my second youngest brother, Nero, although he likes to deny having feelings for her.

But the arrival of the human girl does pose a new problem. Apparently, she passed out the moment she gazed at Madoc, and it seems she's a human with a weak constitution.

Great. Just what we need.

Belle is determined that we take care of her and that we try to get her back home, and it seems we've all come to a collective agreement.

The girl Alice stays with us. At least until we can return her home.

We all have dinner at a small table inside our luxury cabin. It's no king-sized meal but it will do. Cooked wraith tastes like shit, but beggars can't be choosers.

Belle is all too happy to chomp on the flesh of one of the creatures who preyed upon her, and I smile when I see her looking so cocky and sure of herself.

Madoc says she stood up to a bunch of wraiths earlier, and I've never been so proud of my sunshine.

Our other human guest, Alice, sleeps in the spare room. It was meant to be Belle's, but it appears Belle will need a new place to sleep now.

She's welcome to take my bed.

Enzo sits at the head of the table as usual. Even though we fell from grace and were banished to live at the fringes of our former kingdom, he still eats with all the regality of a king. Although he's a little rougher around the edges these days, he's still king in *my* eyes.

Fuck our uncle. He was after our thrones for years, and once our father died and handed down the kingdom to us, his four sons, he was pissed that *he* wasn't the one next in line. Yet the moment we all returned to the Abyss, he exploited our weaknesses, seizing his chance, and I swear, we will get him back.

I don't even know what the hell happened to him after the enchantress banished us. If I had to wager a guess; he was up to no good.

He was always a twisted one, that uncle of ours.

Belle sits kitty-corner to Enzo. Madoc is on her right while I sit opposite the psycho. Nero takes the other end of the table.

The same seating arrangements we had back at the castle in the human world. How some things never change.

I keep stealing glances at Belle. I can tell she's itching to speak up and I wish she would just say what was on her mind.

"What is it, sunshine?" I ask.

Everyone turns to Belle and she sighs, dropping her fork. "I was thinking... if it would be okay if we could speak to the king. Tell him about everything that's going on with the humans. After all, it was the main reason I came to the Abyss. To seek your help. Things are getting drastically worse."

Each of us shuffles uncomfortably. It's not that we have anything against our uncle. Well, we do. We hate his guts, but he banished us. He threatened he would kill us if we so much as stepped a toe inside the castle again.

Belle has left us in a predicament indeed. But I know she's right. We can't just sit around in our luxury cabin for the rest of our lives playing happy
families. We need to take action.

People are suffering. Hell, *monsters* are suffering. My uncle has knocked everything out of balance since he came into power. He does not have our peoples' best interests at heart, but he has too many sycophants now.

Many were swayed his way because they lost trust in us. We couldn't even find it in ourselves to give shelter to an elderly lady, and in the end, she banished us to the human realm.

Our uncle had been amassing a following in the human world for years, and as a result, our own people hate us now.

They think of us as weak.

Enzo sighs, placing his own fork down. "It would be too dangerous, Belle. If he saw us..."

Belle scoffs. "Don't tell me you're afraid of him. What's he going to do? If he gets pissy, then challenge him to his throne."

I guffaw, giving up on my own fork and knife as I eat my charred wraith by hand. "That's the spirit, sunshine. But it would be suicide.
Enzo is right."

Belle balls her fists and her fair skin flushes bright red. "So, that's it? You're all just going to hide away out here for the rest of your lives and ignore all the suffering? My father is back in the human world waiting for me. I refuse to just sit around and do nothing. We have to act!"

Her shout echoes through the cabin, and it pains me to say that she's right. She's absolutely right. But we've lost so much of ourselves. We lost our confidence the day our uncle took the throne.

Even Nero, our former spymaster, was unable to detect our uncle's plans, and by the time he did, it was already too late.

But I can see Enzo's point too. Even though it sucks at the fringes, we built a life for ourselves. We had even hoped that Belle would return to us, and she did.

It's the only good thing that has happened to us since we were banished.

We're closer to the human realm now. We can hear them suffering. Some days, it's just a buzz in the background. No more different than a hum in the wind. It's easy to ignore most of the time, but then sometimes the buzzing gets too loud, it's hard to think.

Too many humans are succumbing to the Abyss. They don't even need a portal like the one Belle's father built, and it truly is terrifying.

It's the reason why we have so many wraiths these days. With the constant arrival of humans, they are breeding at a faster rate. But sooner or later, they will multiply to the point where they can no longer even sustain themselves, and we have to do something.

All that human suffering is fucking up our own ecosystem. Wraiths are naturally female. But they can change their sex depending on the environment. Male ones are cropping up these days to help balance out their disgusting species, but I heard that some males are even hatching eggs themselves.

It’s enough to give you nightmares.

They’re not like monsters. We’re all born male, and we’re not hermaphrodites. We need human females to sustain our species, and if they’re succumbing to the Abyss, then we have no choice but to act.

Belle is right.

“Brother...” I say to Enzo, and he peers my way. “Listen to our mate. She makes a valid point. We’re no safer out here than we would be if we returned to the castle. We need to act.”

All is quiet at the table. Nero and Madoc watch our elder brother expectantly, and I can tell they’re at odds.

But when it all boils down to it, we’re all going to die sooner or later.

The suffering in the human world is throwing The Abyss into chaos. Too much darkness. We need a balance of light and dark. That whole yin and yang.

Enzo knows that.

He gets up and leaves the room. “My decision is final. We stay here and create a life for ourselves.”

Well, it was worth a shot.

But I may have no choice in future; I may have to go on without him. I will not be a sitting duck and just wait to die. It’s a matter of when, but it
will happen.

Our own world will be destroyed.

And then there will be nothing left.

Chapter Seven

Belle

I really thought I had Enzo for a moment there. He almost caved, but then he got up and left the table, and his decision was final.

We won't do anything about the darkness spreading through the human world. We will just sit around and play house, and this is just
ridiculous.

How can he just be so complacent? My people are suffering, and no doubt the monsters of the Abyss will suffer too by extension.

We need to see the king at once.

At least Grey appears to agree with me. Maybe the both of us can convince him somehow. We'll gang up on him together.

I try not to dwell on the negative as I now have Alice to take care of. She is still adjusting to life in the Abyss, but she's still nervous and pretty jumpy, finding it hard to concentrate on things that make her happy.

Enzo has spoken with her and assured her that she's safe, but Madoc has been of no help. Alice is shit scared of him, and I will have to have a word with him later to tone it down a notch.

He thinks he's helping, but he really isn't.

I just feel so bad for Alice. She's vulnerable, and I have no idea how to get her back home. I'm still not sure how she even got to the Abyss.

She says she just shut off her emotions, while I had to venture halfway across the country to find my dad's old lab.

I never once gave in to the darkness. Sure, I was aware of it and I saw the devastating effects that it had on the population, but I was always able to keep my head above the water, and not sink into the

pits of despair.

It was the same with the wraiths, too. I'd never felt so strong until I had faced off with one. I wasn't able to defeat my own wraith, but when I saw what they were doing to Alice, I had to intervene.

I can't stand seeing someone else suffer, and I suppose that's why I am eager to take the risk and see the king.

Bring it on. I'm not scared of him.

I stop outside Enzo's room to talk with him. Before my knuckles hit the wood of his door, he invites me inside.

"It's open, Belle."

How did he know it was me?

Pushing my way inside, I find him staring out the window. His orange, lion-like features are more discernible now, but he's still a little blurred and shadowed, yet he has never looked more regal.

His cowardly behavior has shocked me. Out of all my monsters, I would have thought he'd have been the bravest, considering he looks like the personification of the star sign Leo.

I suppose he just doesn't want any harm to come to his brothers.

"Enzo..." I start, but he stops me.

"It's okay, Belle. I know what you came here to discuss. While I don't agree, I can see your reasoning. We need to stop the darkness from spreading. It is infecting too many. It's not sustainable for either of our worlds."

He pauses a moment to peer out the window, gazing at something distant on the horizon. Then he sighs, closing his eyes. "But it would be madness to face our uncle. It's been one hundred years and his threat was all too clear. I don't want to see my brothers hurt. I don't want to see you or Alice hurt."

Again, I say nothing. I just keep my head bowed.

Enzo turns away from the window at last and finally faces me. His orange eyes burn like torches.

"But we can't just sit back and do nothing. All... all right. We will go to the castle. Surely, our uncle will see sense and want to do something about the darkness."

Tears burn the back of my eyes. I knew he would want to help. I just had to have faith in him.

I step toward him, pressing my head to his chest so I can give him a hug. "Thank you. It means a lot."

We stay that way for a while, and I don't miss the vibrating in Enzo's deep chest, and it shoots straight to my pussy. He likes having me close.

“That reminds me,” he purrs. “There has been something I have wanted to show you ever since you arrived. We’ve been waiting a hundred years after all. Come.”

Well, call me piqued.

Enzo leads the way out of the room, and my heart thumps with excitement. What wonders does he have to show me? I hope it’s a new library.

We arrive at a room at the end of their log cabin, and I raise my brow as I peer up at the monster in question.

What the heck is in there?

Enzo produces a key from his pocket and slips it inside the door, and now we both step into the room. My chin hits the floor when I spy the gargantuan bed in the center.

Wowzers. It’s definitely fit for a king or *four* kings. And maybe one queen too.

I guess that was the intention.

“We created this room in the hope that you would someday return to us, little bell, and now that you’re finally here, well, I think it’s about time we gave the bed a test run.”

I quirk my brow, stepping into the room as I place my hand down on the mattress. I bet the bedsprings are strong. They’d have to be to endure the weight of all my monsters.

My breath comes in gasps as I envision the things they will do to me on this very bed, just like I always pictured in my dreams, and now I gaze up at Enzo, biting my lip.

“Will Madoc and Grey be joining us too?”

Enzo chuckles. “They’re already on their way. They just need to return from their hunt first.”

Excitement thrums through my veins like a nest of angry hornets, and I don’t think I will be able to wait that long. My legs pulse, and I squeeze my thighs together, trying to stave off my desire.

Enzo stills, his nostrils flaring as he gets a sniff of the lust dripping between my legs, and now he bares his teeth.

“Screw my brothers...”

In a flash, he has me on the bed, and the weight of his body crushes me like a rock. His orange eyes smolder as he pins my hands above my head, trapping me in place, and I melt into putty like a helpless damsel.

It looks like this little princess needs to be rescued from the big, bad monster.

With a snarl, Enzo leans down and bites my neck, and my back arches when he digs his teeth in a little too deep. White lights flash behind my eyes, and just the bite of his jaw is enough to make me come.

I'm a zebra on the African savanna, getting the life sucked from her lungs by a vicious lion, and talk about the whole predator/prey dynamic.

I guess my monsters are even stronger in this world, more animal-like, and I'm certainly looking forward to seeing what they can do for me.

Enzo lets go of my arms, and he allows me a moment to caress his face. I start with that aquiline nose, running my finger down the bridge until I stop at his lips, and now I caress his mouth, eliciting a deep purr from his chest.

He really is one big kitty cat. A cat with horns.

Now I reach my hands for his horns, and my fingers graze those bumps and ridges. They remind me of the grooves along Madoc's and Grey's dicks, and I hope Enzo's is just as ridged too.

Enzo closes his eyes when I caress the base of his horns, and he appears to be secreting some kind of fluid there. It's musky and sharp, and I'm pretty sure my pupils blow out when the scent travels to my nose.

Fuck. It's highly addictive. Kind of like men's cologne.

"It's... my musk. Horned monsters often secret musk from their horns when they're ready to mate."

I sniff the fluid again, losing myself in the scent. Damn. Not even Calvin Klein or Ralph Lauren could compare. Enzo's musk would sell like hotcakes. It's a highly sexual scent, and it makes me want to lick his horns from the base and all the way to the tip.

Slowly, I reach up and lick the secretion from the base of his horn, and I lose myself in his taste as I run my tongue over the grooves of his horn.

Enzo rumbles in deep satisfaction, and I smirk when I reach the tip of his horn and suck. "Do you like it when I lick your horns, Enzo?"

His breathing is jagged as he takes a second to reply. "I like it when you lick any part of me, little bell. I almost don't want my brothers to arrive, but I promised them that the three of us could claim you together. That's why I had this bed built after all."

Again, I lose myself in the bronze-like texture of his horns, tracing my fingers through the grooves, and it really doesn't take a lot to turn this former gentleman into monster putty.

There comes a loud hollering outside, and it's Madoc. He likes to make noise when he returns home, and I don't miss Enzo's eye roll.

"Speak of the devil..."

It doesn't take Madoc long to find us. He must have caught a whiff of my scent, and now he comes barging into the room, his eyes wild as they settle on me and Enzo.

“Hey, no fair. You started without us!”

The psycho dives onto the bed, making the whole thing shake, and the cabin seems to rumble. Then Grey steps into the room, closing the door behind him. Just before the wood clicks in place, I spy the violet eyes of Nero out in the hall, and they’re focused solely on me.

My heart aches when I see the longing in his gaze. I hope he understands that he would always have a place on my bed with his brothers, but he has already made up his mind.

He doesn’t want to get his heart broken. After all, the future is uncertain, and there is no telling what will happen.

Finally, Grey shuts the door, and now it’s just me and my three monsters.

Enzo has yet to claim me, so I take it he will have first dibs. Madoc and Grey lay on either side of me as Enzo removes his clothes, and now I finally get a glimpse of that muscled chest.

He’s covered in soft hair, and I reach my hand up, circling my palm into the swirling pattern. I can feel his heart pounding beneath my fingers, and it’s so strong. *He’s* strong, like a formidable ox, and I know he will lead us well in the tough times ahead.

He shuts his eyes as I rake my fingers down his chest, and he’s all chiseled, grooved muscle. It’s like someone sculpted him from clay.

Soon, I stop at the cut V of his hips, untying the strings of his pants, and the fabric falls loose. His dick springs forth, and I finally get an eyeful of that impressive girth.

It’s even bigger than his horns, and twice as grooved, twice as chiseled, and I bite my lip.

That’s going to feel so goddamn good rubbing up against my walls.

“Open up, my little bell. I want to fill your mouth with my seed.”

My heart thumps against my ribs, and now I open wide, showing him my teeth. The three of them watch with bated breath as I part my lips, waiting for his seed, and I’m pretty sure Madoc makes one of his stupid giggles.

Madoc and Grey grab onto my arms on either side, and it’s not as if I would try to escape. I want this. I want all three of them inside me at once, filling up every hole with their delicious seed.

All I wear is a white silken dress. One they’d been holding onto in the hopes that I would return, but it doesn’t look as if it will stay on for long. The material leaves little to the imagination, and there’s no mistaking the hard points of my breasts as my lungs heave.

Finally, Enzo pumps his cock, squirting his seed into my mouth, and I get a taste of citrus fruit. Why do my monsters taste so good? Whereas Grey is sweet like chocolate, Madoc is spicy, and Enzo is lemony.

The three of them watch as Enzo's cum pools inside my mouth, and now the former king tells me to swallow. I don't just swallow. I swill him around a little, and his lemon taste lingers like mouth wash.

Madoc giggles like a happy idiot, and now he grabs his own cock. "My turn!"

"No," Enzo says, and Madoc deflates. "I'm going to claim her first. Then you can have your fun, little brother."

Madoc pouts, letting go of his dick. "Fine. But I get to lick her tits!"

Enzo rolls his eyes. "Fine."

The three of them position themselves around me. Enzo aligns his body with mine, slipping his hard length between my legs. The grooved edges of his shaft rub against my walls, making my eyes roll back into my skull. Little stars explode inside them.

I always wondered how they were able to fit inside me. They're not exactly small, but it's almost as if my body was made for their gigantic cocks.

Soon Enzo and I are face to face, nose to nose as he swells inside me. He shifts me up on the bed, the cotton sheets making me gasp as they scrape against my bare ass, and I'm so sensitive right now.

It's as if my senses have been heightened somehow.

Madoc flicks his tongue out, licking the sweat from my breasts. The forked tip tickles the taut flesh of my right nipple, and I pinch my eyes, feeling like my whole body is about to combust.

Grey positions himself behind me, fanning his wings out to shroud the four of us, and now he slips his own cock into my backside. The grooved texture of his own shaft scrapes at the tight ring of muscles, and now I clench around Enzo, making him hiss in pleasure.

Madoc stops licking my breasts, and once again he grabs his cock and pumps his seed into my eager mouth, and his spicy taste makes me come alive. It mixes perfectly with Enzo's lemon, and my senses go into overdrive as I try to make out their unique tastes.

Enzo and Madoc take turns pushing inside, and back and forth they go. All the while, Madoc fills my mouth with his spicy seed, and it's not long until they bring me to a blinding climax.

When one orgasm ends, another begins, chasing the heels of the last, and on and on it goes, tidal wave after tidal wave.

Soon my whole vision whitens, and it's enough to turn a woman blind. But it was the reunion I could have hoped for and more.

I never want this mind-numbing pleasure to stop.

Chapter Eight

Nero

I watch rigidly as Belle spins before a mirror, checking out her reflection. She wears one of the dresses that Enzo had been saving for her, and she simply looks breath-taking.

It's blue, her favorite color, and it suits her perfectly.

It was painful seeing her go into that room with my brothers the other day, and I was half-tempted to storm across the cabin and pleasure her too. But if her satisfied moans were any indication, then it appeared that my brothers already had her covered, and maybe she doesn't even need me.

Why would she want *me* moping around when she already has three monsters waiting at her beck and call?

The best thing I could do for her was to keep her little friend *Alice* company. The poor thing has barely left her room, and it's the least I can do. She's so fragile, and it's a shame to see such a sweet-looking creature succumbing to the darkness.

Alice is pretty much away with the *faeries*, as they say. She explained to Belle that she once followed a little white rabbit into a hole back when she was nine, falling into a world of talking flowers and tea parties, and she hasn't been the same since. Doctors declared her insane years ago.

It was what led to her downfall. The doctors had agreed she was suffering delusions in the end, and it was how she learned to shut down her emotions.

I'm afraid there aren't talking flowers in this realm, though, but I don't think she's insane. I think she's just lost.

And Belle is determined to get her back on track and return her to the human world. That's what I love about her. So caring and compassionate, my stone heart can't take it.

One day, she is going to tempt me.

"What do you think, Alice?"

Belle looks across the room. The young girl sits on a chair in the corner, her arms wrapped around her legs, and her big blue eyes gaze at nothing.

She wears a similar blue dress to Belle, and they could pass for sisters right now.

"It's... blue..." Alice states stoically, and my heart clenches.

It's like someone sucked the emotions from her veins, leaving behind this poor husk of a girl. Madoc was wise to bring her back to the hideout; who knew what would have happened to her if he and Belle hadn't arrived on time.

The wraiths would have sucked her dry. That's what they do to humans, and it's the reason why they are growing in numbers. More and more humans like Alice are falling into the Abyss, and we have to do something. Fast.

Or it will only be a matter of time until the world is destroyed. Both worlds.

Belle beams, giving the dress another spin, and she hardly looks perturbed by the girl's lackluster response. "It sure is!"

Alice gazes off into the distance yet again, and it hurts to look at her. Her eyes have that glassy sheen, and I bet she has gone back to the land of *Wonderland* again.

"Violets are blue... I once knew a violet. She called me *weed*."

That's right. The talking *flower* thing.

Belle peers my way, and we share a small look of mutual understanding. We don't judge the poor girl or belittle her in any way; we just let her continue with her ramblings.

She has yet to tie up the strings of her dress, and now she indicates for me to help her. "Think you can help a girl out, Nero?"

My body tenses as I gaze at her back. The dress shows just the right amount of skin and neck, and I don't think I'm going to be able to make physical contact.

This is going to be hard.

However, I don't want to leave her hanging, so I approach her side, fussing with the strings of her dress.

Belle gasps when my claws graze her skin ever so slightly. and I know it's not out of shock or dismay. Goosebumps pop along the back of her neck, and I spy her hair standing on end.

It's like my touch has given her an electrical shock.

Her breath stutters, and I fight off the urge to wrap my hands around her and press her close to my chest. All I want to do is rip off that dress with my claws and show her a *real* good time. If she thought my brothers were deadly, then wait until she sees what I can do.

This tail of mine has many uses, after all.

But I don't want to tread down that dangerous path. The last human woman I fell in love with broke my heart. She'd lived out her life, and I had no choice but to watch as she slowly died.

She had been my mate. Even though she could never bear me a son, I still loved her, and there's not a day that goes by when I don't think about her.

And it's for that reason that I cannot pursue Belle. The others have never had their hearts broken, and one day they will have no choice but to watch as Belle dies too.

It's how it always ends.

This way is better for the both of us.

Finally, I finish tying her dress, leaving the room at last.

We're about to embark on our journey to the castle, and it's been a while. I have missed its shiny, clean walls, and don't forget the polished floors too.

Much nicer than our rustic cabin at the edge of the Abyss.

But our uncle made his thoughts loud and clear: "If you ever return, then you will be executed."

We're risking a lot today, but we have no choice. We have to stop the darkness from spreading. Otherwise, there will be nothing left.

No Abyss, no humans, just nothing. An endless void.

Time to return home.

Chapter Nine

Belle

The castle juts up along the horizon, and after three long, treacherous days of camping in the wildlands of the Abyss, we finally arrive. And thank goodness, too. I had to pass through dark, murky terrain just to get here, and the trip almost near killed me.

Also, we lost Alice a few times, and to say that my heart was in my mouth would be an understatement. We have to keep her supervised at all times.

She is not well and is highly vulnerable. No doubt the wretched creatures of this world would have taken advantage of her. Again. They feed off human fear and misery. It fuels them and gives them life, so I will have to be strong for both of us.

A pair of humans like us? We're pretty much walking targets. If it had just been the two of us, then we would have perished the moment we set off from the fringes, and once again I'm grateful to have found my monsters. I'm going to need them to convince their uncle to help us.

I have no idea what to expect once we arrive at the castle. According to Grey, the new king is a bit of an ass and may need some serious convincing. He's pretty indifferent to humans. His only interest in them is when he needs women as breeding stock, but other times, he couldn't care less.

It appears he doesn't care all that much for the interests of his own people too, but it's not as if we have a choice. There is no one else we can seek for help. We have to do this. There is too much at stake.

Human lives will be lost to the Abyss. And then monsters will slowly perish as a result. It's about balance, and both universes lack that equilibrium right now.

The six of us arrive near the castle borders, and the moment the guards spy us, they lock us up in chains and drag us to the castle like a pack of criminals.

Enzo remains resolute as he takes the lead, and I hate that I am making him do this. The king behind those castle walls once threatened to kill him and his brothers if he ever dared return, and I hope everything goes to plan.

We don't mean harm, and we don't mean to steal his throne.

The guards lead us through a backdoor, and it seems they're leading us down into the dungeons. This isn't good. We need to speak with the king, not some jailers.

I have to say something.

"We come in peace. Please, take us to your king at once."

A guard scoffs at my request. "What? So you can kill him and usurp his throne?"

I seal my lips. The guard doesn't have to know that I told Enzo and his brothers that they should try their hand at retaking their thrones before we left, and my silence isn't helping.

The guards continue their path through the dungeons, their bodies covered head to toe in plated armor. These are the first monsters I have met other than my own. What do they look like? Do they resemble one of my own monsters?

Does the king?

Finally, the guards stop outside a couple of cells. The head guard directs my monsters into one, and Alice and me into another, and my heart pounds.

No, they can't separate us.

Madoc growls when one of the guards tries to steer me and Alice away, and the smaller monster looks at his boss pleadingly. It appears my psycho has a reputation amongst his brethren.

The captain of the guard sighs, waving his hand in Madoc's general direction. "Fine. You can stay with your mates."

Well, only one of us is their mate—Alice is fifteen, the pervert—but whatever. As long as we won't be separated.

One by one, we enter the cell, and the doors clang shut behind us. Alice whimpers, and I wrap my arms around her, trying to reassure her that everything is fine and we will get out of the cell soon.

Shit. Maybe this wasn't a good idea. I get the feeling that I have led my monsters into a den of vipers.

Soon it's just the six of us as the guards leave us alone in the dungeon cell, and what's happening up above? Has the king already found out about our arrival? Is he pissed that his nephews ignored his warnings and showed up at his castle after a hundred years?

I suppose a hundred years is a long time. Maybe the king has had a change of heart about executing his nephews. They say absence makes the heart grow fonder after all.

We hover around the cell in various positions. Enzo stands facing the door as if he's waiting for word from the guards, and Grey paces back and forth, his long wings trailing on the floor behind him. Nero lingers in the corner, folding his arms, while Madoc spins his knife around in his hand, his eyes burning like fire gems.

"Do you think they're discussing how they're going to kill us? I hope I get burned alive!"

Alice flinches. I hug her closer, scowling at Madoc. "Will you shut up? You're not helping!"

Madoc giggles obscenely, and now he flips the blade around, passing the handle to Alice. She stares at his hand like it's a live snake.

"For you, blondie. You need to protect yourself after all. My beauty already has the knife I gave her, so it's only fair that you should be armed, too."

Alice's eyes widen in terror, and the lights from the flickering scones reflect the blue. The others watch the exchange with interest. Honestly, I'm surprised I never thought to give her a knife myself, and I guess I'm the world's worst big sister.

Finally, she reaches across and wraps her hand around Madoc's blade, and she holds it out in front of her, gazing at the steel in wonder. Her mouth parts in an 'O' as she waves it around, and I don't miss the crazy flash inside her baby blues. Great, it looks like my monster has tainted her, a once sweet, innocent girl.

But I suppose a tainted spirit is what she will need if she hopes to survive in this world. I didn't like the way the guards regarded her like she was a piece of meat, and we need to protect ourselves.

Madoc teaches her how to spin her knife, and after a few tries, she manages to get a firm grip, and I'm proud.

Maybe she's not as helpless as she looks. Soon, she will be able to face a bunch of wraiths all on her own. But if we thought the wraiths were bad, then wait until we meet the king and his entire court.

We really are entering a viper nest.

Some time passes, but when a guard arrives and announces that the king has granted us an audience, I yank a hold of my own knife.

Time to fight some snakes.

Chapter Ten

Enzo

My whole body tenses, activating my flight or fight response, and I try to rein in my instincts.

I have to stay calm and focused. No doubt our uncle will be pissed when he sees that we completely ignored his warning a hundred years ago, showing up at his castle like a pack of disobedient little boys, but recent circumstances have given us no choice.

The darkness is spreading, and fast. Too many are being infected, and soon the Abyss won't be able to handle the extra amount of tortured humans entering its sphere.

Surely, he has to have noticed the growth. No one can be that ignorant, right? That blind?

If I were king, I would have had the darkness dealt with long ago, but I can't afford to think like that now. I am not king anymore, but a disgraced monster who was banished to live at the edges of his world, his only solace that his human mate would one day return to him.

We tread up a long, spiral staircase, getting closer and closer to the throne room, and my heart jumps to my throat. Any moment, we will be back in our old throne room, and I will once again have to gaze upon my throne like the commoner I am.

No doubt my uncle will be as smug as a fox, watching his late brother's four disgraced sons bending the knee for him.

He is going to humiliate us, but I am more concerned about the two human women we have in our company. One is our mate, so he won't touch her, but there's another who is yet to be claimed.

She's only fifteen, but I wouldn't put it past my uncle to stake his claim. Monsters by tradition will wait until women are of age, but he has always been a sleazy one.

That's why we box them in right now. Two monsters in the front and two at the back. It should give them some semblance of safety.

Finally, we reach the top of the staircase, and now the guards lead us down a series of winding halls. My brothers are just as tense as I am, well, except maybe for Madoc, who looks ready to fight.

The guards are afraid of him. They never even bothered to confiscate his weapons, and I hope he doesn't do anything foolish.

We should have left him at home.

Strange. This castle was once our home. Each of us was raised here from spawn, but now it belongs to our uncle, and if Father could see us now...

Would he be ashamed?

The clamor of voices reaches my ears, and I stand straighter, trying to look as dignified and poised as I can. When we enter the throne room, all eyes fall on us.

The whole court is here. They used to be our court, but now they serve under the might of our uncle. Several of them look pleased to see us, and I don't mean that in a pleasant way.

Monsters who once respected us, but now they laugh and sneer as we enter one by one. Belle and Alice hide between the four of us, and good. It's best they remain hidden.

One of them is an unclaimed virgin, and highly vulnerable, so we must keep her safe.

The crowd parts, and now my uncle comes into view at last. He lounges back on his throne, well, *my* old throne, wearing an embroidered cape of velvet, and he hasn't changed at all.

He's still foul. His features resemble that of a wild boar: large, wet snout, tusks, and beady, sunken eyes. Those eyes don't leave us as we line up, keeping Alice and Belle from his prying gaze.

A dry, rasping sound comes from his chest, and I sense Madoc's low growl behind me. We mustn't give in. Our uncle is only trying to bait us. He hated our father, and by extension, that meant he hated us too, so he is going to make an example out of us.

"Well, well, if it isn't my four favorite nephews..."

None of us reply. We just keep our heads bowed, showing our respect. To my surprise, even Madoc keeps it together, and I'm impressed.

He leans back on his throne, tapping his claws against the arm of my former throne. "Well, are you going to bow?"

I glance at Madoc. His molars grind together, and I communicate with my eyes. *Do as he says. We're outnumbered.*

Madoc's body shakes, and for a moment I think he's going to burst into flames. I once saw him breathe fire, so I know that's not impossible. While the four of us may be strong, coming from excellent breeding stock, we need to play our cards right and bend to our uncle's every whim.

There's a reason why our uncle hates us; his brother, our father, was the favorite child. Quite often, monsters are born in pairs, one normally being the spare, surplus. Back then, monster populations were dwindling, so it was common for human women to bear two children, and then the offspring would go on to compete.

It was pretty obvious who was the strongest of the two brothers. Our father obviously got the best genes, and in turn, our grandfather nourished him and raised him as his successor while our uncle got ignored.

So as payback for his cruel childhood, he will force his brother's offspring to bend the knee for him. He's going to love every moment of this, but we have to do as he says.

So we all get down on our knees, Belle and Alice included, and now we wait for our uncle to speak. He basks in the moment, taking his sweet time, but I try to maintain my composure. Madoc is trembling, smoke billowing from his nostrils, and I try to communicate with him internally again.

"I thought I made my feelings clear one hundred years ago," our uncle speaks at last. "So there better be a good explanation for your sudden arrival."

I sigh, glancing his way. "There is, Your Majesty. The darkness has been getting worse in the human realm. More and more humans are succumbing to the Abyss. The wraiths are out of control, and it won't be long before our own world is thrown into chaos. We must act."

My uncle's small eyes widen, and then a deafening quiet falls over the throne room. Then he breaks into raucous laughter, and soon enough, his sheep follow him.

"You can't be serious. You want to help a bunch of *humans*? Who cares? They deserve what's coming to them, and you know it. I saw it for years when you had us all banished there, sweet nephew of mine, and if you ask me, the humans are beyond saving. Beyond redemption. They are slowly destroying their world, and now they must face the consequences."

I go to reply, but Belle pushes me aside, and the look in her hazel eyes could set the world ablaze. "You're wrong. There are some good humans still, and they can be saved."

The courtroom stills at her sudden announcement. They would have sensed her presence already, but to see a human woman acting so bold, defiant, is a sight to behold indeed.

They're usually nothing but breeding stock. No more different from cattle, and cattle doesn't speak. It doesn't have a voice.

The court doesn't know what to make of her. Madoc purrs behind me appreciatively, and I hear Grey telling him to keep it together.

Finally, a placated smirk crosses my uncle's snout, and now he gives Belle an appreciative glance of his own. "My, a spunky one. I see why you all like her so much, dear nephews, but if you don't get a better handle on your mate, I won't hesitate to kill her."

Madoc snaps his teeth, but I stretch my arm out, holding him back. Guards point their swords at him.

At least Belle doesn't look the least perturbed. She continues to give my uncle that defiant look, and I'll admit, she has never looked so beautiful. She really is a fiery minx.

The look my uncle gives her next almost makes me want to stick a knife in his chest, but I maintain my decorum. I'm the oldest and the strongest. My brothers look up to me, and I have to be a good example for them.

It's been that way ever since we were spawn. I was ten when Madoc was born and eight when Nero arrived. Grey is four years my junior, so I have to be the 'grown up'.

In human terms, I'm equivalent to the age of thirty-five. That would make Grey thirty-one, Nero, twenty-seven, and Madoc, twenty-five. Yet adults we may be, our uncle stills regards us like were sniveling little boys.

He's still pissed about the time I beat him at a duel at age twelve. What can I say? I'm my father's son.

Uncle scoffs. "Are you, female, one of these 'good' humans?"

Belle pushes out her chest, and I wish she wouldn't. Every monster gazes at her breasts, but once again my mate doesn't look the least perturbed. She has no idea what she is up against.

"Yes. The same as my father too, and a number of people I know. None of them deserve to suffer. Besides, you and your people would only suffer as a result too. Our darkness is throwing your world into chaos."

He taps his fingers against the arm of the throne again. "That so, female?"

Belle breathes air in through her nose. "Yes. And the name is Belle. Women do have names, you know."

My uncle sneers at her insolence. Then his eyes flick toward Alice. She gasps, hiding behind Madoc, and it appears she's lost all fear for my baby brother at last.

She's finally discovered that there are worse monsters in this world after all. Ones who wouldn't hesitate to use her.

A smirk stretches my uncle's lips. "Then I give you a wager, *Belle*. If you can prove to me that humans are truly worth saving, then I offer you my help. If not, then I turn a blind eye, and... I get to

keep *her*...”

He points at Alice. She whimpers, and Madoc takes it upon himself to protect her like some big brother. He bares his teeth at our king.

Our uncle chuckles. “I always loved a blonde, and this one’s going to be a beauty in several years. I will add her to my *collection.* Rather foolish of you all to bring an unclaimed woman into this den of vipers.”

Den of vipers? That truly is what this place is. It’s no place for a young girl.

Belle gazes at Alice, and her eyes waver as she fears for the younger female. But then she turns to our uncle, and my heart almost explodes as a sexy smirk crosses her face.

“Bring it on.”

Chapter Eleven

Belle

Well, I pretty much just threw Alice to the wolves, and after I promised I would keep her safe and return her home.

The poor girl cries, dropping to her knees, and it takes everything in me not to break down and cry along with her. This sucks. I really wish the king didn't have to bring her into this; she is innocent and doesn't deserve any of the shit that's about to be thrown her way, but I know I can fight for her honor.

I will set her free; I will set *everyone* free.

Screw the king. I will show him how much humans are truly worth saving.

The king settles back onto his throne, keeping his hungry gaze on Alice. She holds onto my monster, Madoc, and he does his very best to placate her. The others look at me with uncertainty, and I bet they're just as shocked as I am that I agreed to such a wager.

I guess I truly believe that humans are worth the effort of the king getting off his fat ass for.

Enzo steps toward me, whispering into my ear. "Are you sure about this, Belle? We can't guarantee the safety of your friend. She may never return to the human world after this. My uncle can be pretty sly."

I'm not surprised; he banished his own nephews and took their thrones just because he was petty and jealous, but I know I can prove him wrong about humans and save Alice in the process.

The king brings the court back to order, and now we all wait with bated breath. I'm not sure what he plans to have me do yet, but if it's anything like facing off to a bunch of wraiths, I think I can handle it.

"Quite ironic. How you're so willing to prove how much your race is worth saving, yet you just threw one of your own under a bus... is that how they phrase it in the human world? Forgive me, it's been one hundred years."

He cackles yet again, making his stupid jowls wiggle, and I ball my fists. The king really is one ugly brute, and I have to ensure Alice doesn't end up being one of his concubines.

While I'm at it, I will rescue the other women he has in his clutches too. I bet they're all husks of girls.

"I didn't throw her under a bus, because I know I can prove you wrong. I'm ready. What do I have to do first?"

The court whispers, and we all wait as the king discusses with his private council. I chew my lip, stealing glances at Alice. She wipes tears from her eyes, and I hope she can forgive me one day. I should have refused, but I gambled with her freedom in the end.

I'm the worst big sister.

Finally, the king coughs, and we all give him the attention he rightfully deserves.

"In order to prove me wrong about humans, Belle, you must complete three challenges. For the first challenge, you must go to the Forest of Forbidden Fruit. Temptation awaits you on every branch, and many of your kind have lost themselves in these woods. If you can resist picking the fruit from any of its trees, then you will win the first challenge."

So, I am Eve in the Garden of Eden? All I have to do is resist picking an apple from a tree, and I pass the first challenge?

The Forest of Forbidden Fruit? Please. Sounds like child's play.

"I have one condition..." Enzo steps forth, and the king grants him to speak with a wave of the hand. My monster continues. "One of us must accompany her."

The king scoffs. "And why should I allow that? If she wants to prove to me how much her race is worth saving, then she must complete the challenge alone."

Enzo sighs, trying to keep his wits about him. He addresses his uncle again. "That may be so, but at the end of the day, she is our mate, and the urge to keep her safe and ensure no harm comes her way is strong. Surely, you cannot attest to that?"

One of the king's advisors leans forward and whispers into his ear, and the ruler wrinkles his nose in disgust. "Very well. It *is* one of our respected traditions as *monsters*, after all, to ensure the well-being and safety of our human females. All right. One of you can accompany her to the Forest of Forbidden Fruit."

I'm not so sure that is wise; I have to resist temptation in this forest, so the last thing I need is one of my monsters *tempting* me. Plus, as the days go by, I'm getting even more aroused in their presence. I'm not sure if it's something in the air, but I feel hotter whenever I'm near them, and there's a strange

emptiness inside me that yearns for their seed and cocks. The only thing holding me back from jumping them is Alice. I didn't want to scare her while we were on the road, so yeah, it's been three days since I got any, and I am feeling the effects.

However, the king never said that there were rules against me fucking my monsters in the Forest of Forbidden Fruit. Only that I should not pick any of its delicious fruit.

How hard can it be? They're just apples.

If they were covered in caramel maybe, but I think I can resist picking some fruit from a wild orchard that's most likely covered in worms. Yuck. No thank you.

So I guess I need to decide which of my monsters to take?

My eyes find Madoc at once, and there's no missing the flames dancing in his eyes. He's going to burn that whole forest to the ground, delicious fruit and all.

Sure, he may look like a human version of a snake, with the tongue and slitted eyes, but he's one snake I can trust. I certainly don't trust the snakes in this courtyard, especially the giant anaconda that currently sits curled up on the throne.

Let's do this.

Me and Madoc against some fruit.

Chapter Twelve

Madoc

I'm jittering with excitement as my mate and I embark on our first mission, and at last... just the two of us.

I want to sing the cheesy song, but she slaps my shoulder with her hand and stops me. I don't know why she is so angry with my singing; at least I'm scaring all the scary creatures away (plus, I know where else she can slap me with that hand).

Besides, I sound like a soprano; I could fill up an auditorium.

Alice is safe with Enzo and the others right now, so at least I can embark on this mission with ease. My uncle will not get his hands on the delicate little human. I will slit his throat if he thinks he will get his mangy claws on her.

I never had a younger sibling, being the youngest (and most handsome) out of my four brothers, but I'm starting to see that little teen as my own kid sister.

The way her eyes lit up when I gave her the knife. So precious. She will make a cute psychopath indeed.

"How much farther are we?" Belle gripes. "We've been walking for days."

It's actually only been several hours, but I don't bother to tell my mate. Either she's overexaggerating or the last several hours have felt like days to her.

Is time slowing down for her? Shit. Not a good sign. That's the effect the Abyss can have on humans. Time can become static, and you feel as if you are trapped, stuck in limbo, with no past, present, or future.

I'm not sure how her eyesight is faring either; she explains that everything still looks a little blurry. But since she swallowed Enzo's cum, and mine too—and let's not forget Grey—she appears to be getting better. Her eyes have focus now.

Alice has that unfocused look, and I wouldn't be surprised if the girl was blind in this world. She does not belong here; she belongs in a different world of talking flowers, smoking caterpillars, and smiling cats.

Her world sounds so much nicer than the Abyss. A land where there is only misery. And temptation too since we're heading to the Forest of Forbidden Fruit.

We're just approaching the border. Just on the horizon, I spy that thick cluster of trees, the location of Belle's first challenge. If she passes today, the king will consider her pleas about stopping the darkness.

I really don't want to see any more humans succumb. Now that I'm no longer living on the fringes, I can't be there to help the humans who peek into the Abyss, balancing over its sharp precipice.

There will be no one there to protect them from the wraiths.

The more time we waste, the more humans will succumb, and it's just not fair; I will personally kill the king myself once all this is over.

We're going to get our thrones back.

I don't care what my brothers think; we will not give up. I was always the reckless one, after all.

Finally, we arrive at the border of the Forest of Forbidden Fruit, and already Belle's eyes are bigger than her belly. Not that she had a big belly to begin with. Hers is small, flat, and perfect.

The forest has no effect on me, but it does have an effect on Belle. We may as well have stumbled onto a goldmine. The trees bear bright, colorful fruit in all shapes and sizes, each one promising a unique temptation. Green is usually money; yellow is an endless supply of happiness, and red is sex (my personal favorite). Pink is love, purple is luxury, and blue is spiritual freedom.

This forest is probably the first splash of color Belle has seen since arriving in the Abyss. Everything so far has been brown, gray, and black, but there's a whole rainbow in there.

Taste the rainbow, they said. It will be *fun*, they said. Well, I have tasted the rainbow, and it's *way* too spicy.

"Well, here goes nothing. You ready, my beauty?"

We stop at an inviting footpath. It weaves through the forest of brightly colored fruit, beckoning us inside, but again, it has no effect on me.

Belle's pupils have blown out, and I'm almost envious of the forest for stealing away my beauty's attention; I will burn it down to the ground.

She breathes in and nods once. "Yes. Let's."

Oh, no. She's speaking in broken sentences. The forest has already enamored her. This will be hard.

Lucky thing she has me; I'm more tempting than anything in this forest.

I decide to go in first. The fruit seems to glow, and it really does look like wild candy growing on trees. The smell in the air is sweet, and the aroma is having an effect on my mate.

Now she looks like Alice when she falls down the rabbit hole into Wonderland, and she's becoming delirious. I'm not sure what the fruit is saying to her; I don't even know if the fruit can talk, but if it does, it probably sounds like those men you here at the carnival at game stands, shouting and hollering with their false promises, and I will burn them all.

Finally, Belle stops, and her eyes land on a melon. It pulsates with light, beckoning her forward, and I have to stop before she gives in to the fruit.

I will not lose her; we can defeat the stupid fruit and save the human race. And we can also defeat my uncle, retake our thrones, and rescue Alice.

Let's do this.

Chapter Thirteen

Belle

That voice...

It echoes in the deep recesses of my mind, and it's one I know well. It's the voice I hear in the darkest of times, giving me strength, and at once, I go to the source of that sound.

It's coming from inside a melon. One that's bright yellow, burning brighter than the sun in the sky. I'm pretty sure it *is* the sun, something I haven't seen for a very, very long time. For five years, in fact, and it looks as if I have finally found it: true, endless happiness.

"Come, Belle... see what happiness awaits you..."

The melon is *talking* to me, and... it sounds like my mom. I haven't heard that voice since I was ten.

Is it really her? Her spirit? I always believed she went to a better place. Somewhere far beyond the reaches of our realm, even the Abyss, and could that melon truly give me my mother back?

Endless happiness, the melon said after all, and I can't pass that up. I would be a fool to throw anyway an endless supply of happiness. There is too much misery in the world, and by God, I deserve to be happy. I have dwelled in misery for far too long. We all have.

For my fallen comrades who have succumbed to the Abyss, I will take a bite of that happiness.

I step closer as the melon beckons me, and already its pulsating light fills me with joy I haven't felt in years. I see a world where the sun always shines, where my loved ones never die, and everyone is smiling. A wide smile spreads across my face, and I'm using muscles I haven't used in years.

Happiness in its purest form. I could cry from the sheer joy it gives me.

I need to be in that world. Screw the Abyss, and screw the human world.

Just give in to the happiness...

"Yes, Belle. Take a bite. This happiness can be yours too. You will never know an ounce of misery again. There will be no more darkness in your world. No more shadows, only sunshine."

Never feel miserable again? Sure sounds nice, but... sounds a little bogus. Also, how does one know happiness if they've never felt sadness? Don't joy and sadness go hand in hand? They work in balance.

Balance. That's what life is all about. Yin and yang. Light and dark.

Now that I look closely enough, no one is truly happy in that world. They think they are, but it's only a toxic kind of happiness. The fake kind. They don't even look human. Like a bunch of living dolls with smiles that look as if they were carved by a butcher knife. There's blood behind those grins, and it's certainly not pretty,

No one has ever felt the joy that is... well, *sadness,* in that world.

It's like a boil. You need to pop that nasty shit so you can heal. Being happy all of the time is not healthy. Period. It's not even realistic. Everyone in the melon looks like a cartoon character, and fuck that.

Finally, I glance away from the melon and meet Madoc's eyes. He watches me impressed.

"You... resisted the happiness?" he asks, his mouth agape. His long tongue lolls out.

I shrug. "Yeah, so? I've found that I like being sad. Sure, it sucks when you feel as if you are stuck in a rut and you will never get out, but then when you finally feel happiness, no matter how small, well, it makes the sadness worth having."

My delightful psychopath smiles, and there's all the happiness I need in this world. "That's my beauty, always looking on the bright side. Besides, if you just wanted to be happy, all you needed to do was ask..."

He steps toward me with a creepy giggle, but I push him away. "I'm not so sure. Seems kinda counterproductive. I'd be giving in to temptation. Also, that cherry is also promising me pretty much the same thing, and, well..."

Yes, a sexy little red cherry promises me an endless amount of sex, and *wow,* her voice. As tempting as she may be, I will have to hold out. Sure, there's an aching emptiness in my core, and my body is working up a sweat, but I think I can resist a little longer.

Madoc snaps his teeth. "Hey, I can give you more than that stupid cherry!"

"Ha, you wish."

I step away from him now and peer around at the other fruit. A bunch of purple grapes promises me an endless amount of luxury, a world where I will never feel uncomfortable, hot, or cold again, and a fuzzy pink peach promises me an endless supply of love, and the sweet Hallmark type too. The peach

almost has me when it shows me a cute Dalmatian puppy with a hearted-shaped nose, and again, love in its purest form.

Nope. No cute love puppies for me, thank you.

A green watermelon promises me money beyond my wildest dreams, and there I am swimming like Scrooge McDuck in a pool of gold. Last but not least, a bunch of blueberries promises me freedom.

There I am, standing atop a mountain, and everything is blue as far as the eyes can see. I feel like I can fly in that world, going anywhere I want. I am not grounded or trapped.

As free as a bird.

I reach forward to pluck at one of the berries, but Madoc slaps my hand, pulling me away from all the fruit. I may not be giving in to their tempting offers, but I am still foolish enough to listen. I guess I was just curious. I never thought I'd be in a forest of talking fruit.

It's kinda eerie, but cool at the same time.

I wonder how much all this fruit would cost on the black market, and it looks like the money melon got to me. He's got me thinking about riches.

"Snap out of it, Belle! Come on. We still have a way to go. We're not out of the woods yet."

Well, that was a brilliant use of that idiom, but he's right. Just the fact that I am giving the fruit my undivided attention is enough for them to trick me. I still can't stop thinking about how delicious that blueberry would be.

Pure, spiritual freedom. Go anywhere you want. Flying in an endless sky of blue...

I need that fucking berry!

Imagine how it would taste with the grape. And a bite of melon too. Imagine how all the fruit would taste together. A delicious fruit cocktail of pure temptation, and now I launch myself at the nearest melon, wrapping my teeth around its ripe flesh. Its yellow juice seeps into my mouth, and my mind explodes with happiness.

All I need now is a freedom berry, a luxury grape, and then I'm good. Riches, sex, and love don't appeal to me so much right now. I have love, and I get plenty of sex, thanks to my monsters.

But money. All the books I could buy in the world.

Books were always my kryptonite.

I'm doomed.

No. Must resist! I have to save Alice, have to save the human world. My father is waiting for me too. I can't fail him now.

I spit the juice out of my mouth and bolt. So long as I don't swallow, then I'm safe. I will pass this test. Must find the exit to this forest.

I break through the trees, sending poor fruit flying this way and that. I'm not sure if it counts, yet who cares. Before long, I skid toward the edge of the forest, almost skittering off a cliff, and holy fuck.

Madoc yanks me back before I fall to my death, and now he wraps his arms around me, pressing me to his strong chest. His wild heartbeat soothes me. I melt beneath his touch, his fire and brimstone scent placating me.

I did it. I escaped the Forest of Forbidden Fruit. One melon fucker almost *got* to me, but I passed. Now I can return to the king as smug as a fox.

"You did it, my beauty. I'm so proud of you."

I pant for breath, placing my ear against his thundering heart. "Y-yeah..."

"You almost caved for a moment. I have to admit. Seeing you ravenous for that forbidden fruit made me horny."

I roll my eyes, burying my nose into his shirt. It appears we're finally out of the woods. Now I can give in to temptation again without feeling guilty.

I'm going to enjoy this.

Madoc lifts my chin and wipes away the leftover juice from my lips. His thumb lingers on my Cupid's bow as he gazes down at me with seductive eyes, and he didn't steal a nip from that cherry, did he?

"You're always free to have a taste of my forbidden fruit, my beauty..."

Well, I could do with removing the taste of melon out of my mouth. It's still tempting me, filling my brain with fake vestiges of happiness where I smile and laugh like a Stepford Housewife.

The horror.

Madoc's spicy cum should remove that toxic taste right away. Plus, it will help with the ache in my core and the empty feeling where his cock should be.

I get down on my knees, giving the crazy psycho what he obviously craves, and now I suck and pump on his dick, filling up on his spicy cum. It seeps through my body, soothing the ache between my legs, and once I'm finished, I stand, wiping my lips.

I set my eyes on that distant castle and smirk.

One down, three more challenges to go.

Chapter Fourteen

Grey

Our uncle didn't look the least bit excited when our mate returned to his court, her hands on her sexy round hips. I think he genuinely thought she would cave to all the fruit, but it looks as if he underestimated her in the end.

It takes a strong person to resist all that temptation, after all, but an even stronger person to realize that it's all just bullshit. Many humans have lost their souls to that forest, being sucked into a mini-universe where there is no escape. You want happiness? Sure. But at a cost.

You have to *bleed* for that smile, but deep down, you're depressed. Money sounds nice too, right? Being able to buy anything you want. Sure, you may never know a moment of financial misery again. Your kids can eat, your *dog* can eat, but the cost? That's right. You're effing miserable. All your old friends hate you now because you're rich and you can't make new ones because they only like you for your money. You are lonely.

Swim like Scrooge McDuck all you want in your big money vault, just be aware that you will be swimming alone in that ocean of money.

Then there's love. Sweet, sweet love. I know it can be hard to find a fault in that kind of temptation, but everything comes with a price. Also, there's a good chance that all that sweetness will give you a tooth cavity in the end, and no one likes tooth decay.

Luxury? Well, you drown in all that plush, rich velvet, forgetting your responsibilities. And then there's freedom. We all remember what happened to Icarus when he flew too close to the sun. His wings melted and then he fell into the sea.

Last but not least is sex, and you guessed it: genital herpes.

Bottom line. Don't give in to temptation because nothing is ever what it seems.

And I've never been prouder for my Belle for resisting all that fruit. She can still have those things but in time. Maybe not all of the time, but I swear that my brothers and I will ensure she lives a comfortable and happy life.

The king confers with his councilmen. Monsters who used to work for us, but now they serve our good-for-nothing uncle. I step toward Belle, ruffling her head. I mess up her brown hair.

"Knew you could pass the first test, sunshine. Proud of you."

She grins up at me, fixing her eyes on Alice. Meanwhile, Madoc hisses at me for ruining Belle's mane, and what is he, twelve? He can be so petty and jealous.

Belle wanders over to Alice. The young girl hides beneath Enzo's shadow, and I've never seen a more frightened creature. If only I could fly her away and send her back to the human world, but she's trapped. She's lucky to have survived this long in the Abyss. Many humans don't even make it past the wraith forest; it's a miracle that any humans make it to the Forest of Forbidden Fruit at all.

She's a broken girl, and I wish I could find all the motherfuckers who were responsible for turning her into this shell of a girl.

Some people just don't deserve to live and I'd happily wring the necks of the people who made Alice this way. So she thinks she went to a world called Wonderland. Who are we to rain on her parade? It's obviously just a case of a wild imagination.

"I promise, Alice," my mate says. "I will win back your freedom. I only have two more challenges, and then you can go free. Also, with the king's help, we can rid the darkness from the human world."

I'm not so sure about that. My uncle was never the type to keep his word, and there's something shifty about his eyes whenever he heard Belle talk of her people's plight.

He almost appeared smug, and it makes me wonder...

Where was he exactly in the five years we were trapped in the human world? Many of our followers and people were banished with us, and that goes for our sad sap of an uncle too.

It was the reason why he managed to rally up so many supporters and overthrow us. We were no longer fit to rule the Abyss, all because we ignored an elderly lady seeking shelter.

Our fellow monsters hold us responsible.

"Isabel Hardgreaves."

Belle peers toward the king when he announces her full name, and now we all come to stand before his throne again. I hate this. It sucks to be standing and looking at where I once sat.

Those thrones belong to us, and I know I'm not the only one who wants to overthrow our uncle. Madoc's eyes burn with the light of a thousand suns whenever he gazes at the fat oaf, and it won't be

long before he pulls a knife and gets us all killed. Enzo is poised as ever, and Nero hides all his emotions behind that calm, stony facade.

But I know they hate every moment of this too.

Those thrones belong to us. They're our father's legacy, but they were taken from us.

Yes, plunging a knife into my uncle's heart right now would be a delicious victory, but I would only screw up Belle's mission. She needs to get back home to her dad and rid the world of the darkness.

And we need all the help we can get.

"So, you managed to pass the first challenge. Well done. You truly are a testament to your race. All that delicious temptation, yet you still resisted. How?"

Belle glances up at the king smugly. "It's not hard to see behind the lies. Happiness? More like concealed misery. Money? Loneliness. Love. Well, too much sweetness can make you sick, after all. Luxury? Hello, bills, you need to pay them! Freedom? All that high altitude would make you dizzy, and sex. Two words: genital herpes."

Madoc and I snort. Well, I snort, but he giggles like a crazed serial killer stalking his prey down a dark alleyway. The king sneers at us, settling back on his throne. His fingernails click against the arm when he taps them.

"Very well. It appears you have somehow managed to restore my faith in humanity, showing me that some humans are, indeed, worth saving. You're smart. I'll give you that."

She smirks. "I get it from my dad. He was a physicist."

The king waves his hand. "Yes, yes, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. However, I hope you are up to the next challenge I have in store for you. Are you ready to hear it?"

She smirks. "Hell yeah."

His eyes burn at her insolent response. "Isabel Hardgreaves... for your next mission, you must seek the Sword of Vitality in the Supreme Mountains."

Supreme Mountains. Oh, boy. Not a great place for humans. That jagged mountain range has the ability to grant any human superpowers, hence why they're called the Supreme Mountains.

The sword he wants her to seek is known as the Sword of Vitality for a reason. It gives the wielder unsurmountable strength. It's embedded deep in a rock of granite, granting the one who yanks it from its stone prison endless power and strength.

Of course, there is always a catch. The human will lose their soul to the Abyss, but even that small surge of power can make the wielder feel as if they are unstoppable. That nothing can get in their way.

They've even been known to move mountains, literally. It's why the mountain range is a wasteland. It has been torn apart by too many overpowered humans who got a little carried away.

This will not be an easy task. Throughout history, humans have always sought strength and power. From the times of Hercules fighting Cerberus the three-headed dog to the modern-day era of comic book superheroes.

But ever my plucky little mate, Belle gives the king her best shit-eating grin and says, "Bring it on."

She's going to need me for this challenge. Madoc went on the last one, and Enzo is keeping Alice preoccupied. Also, Nero is going through some personal stuff right now, so I'm the best monster for the job.

Bring it on then, uncle.

Chapter Fifteen

Belle

The Supreme Mountains? More like the not so supreme mountains.

I've seen better.

So, all I have to do is find the Sword of Vitality and resist its lure? Apparently, it grants the wielder unspeakable power, but who needs power when you've got book smarts?

I never saw the appeal in having power. That was more Gustave's thing, and when I remember that awful being he'd turned into, I shiver. If Gustave had been on this mission instead of me, then he would have failed the moment he stepped into the Forest of Forbidden Fruit.

I don't claim to be perfect myself. I did almost cave to that forest of tempting fruit after all, so I won't get too cocky now. This world has a way of creeping under your skin.

It piques your curiosity, showing you what life would be like if you just gave in and surrendered to its temptation, but I know they're all fake promises.

I have to prove to the king that humans are worth saving. I need to get the monsters on my side so we can wipe the darkness away from the world.

At least there are four monsters I know of who are willing to help, and I gaze up at Grey and smile.

He meets my gaze and bares his teeth in a shark tooth smile. While the gesture may look intimidating, I know he meant it to be genuine.

"You ready, sunshine? Think you can resist all that power?"

I smirk and start my trek down a rocky mountain path. The road is stark as towering rocks surround us on both sides. Grey almost blends in with his gray skin, yet his green eyes remain aglow, his wings folded neatly at his sides.

I'm starting to see everything a hell of a lot better now, but the Abyss still has a darkness about it. The fruit of the Forbidden Forest was the first splash of color I saw since arriving here, and no

wonder so many humans succumb.

They trek this desolate land for days, weeks even, but then when they finally stumble upon that forest of delicious fruit, well, they become possessed.

The fruit definitely caught my attention, throwing me into a trance-like state. Thank God I had Madoc to help me snap out of it. Who knows what would have become of me in the end.

But enough of my previous mission now; I have to focus on this one.

Finally, we enter a mountain gorge, and it's a complete ruin. It almost resembles an old quarry. Loose rocks gather on the ground, and we have to be careful of an avalanche.

I could die in this place.

Lucky thing my mate has wings and can just fly me away to safety.

I kick rocks aside, clearing a path. Grey scans his eyes around, looking on edge, and I wonder what's got his panties in a twist. This place is a wasteland. Nothing lives here.

I bet my voice would echo in this gorge. I won't dare test my theory though. Avalanche.

"So, where *is* this Sword of Vitality?" I whisper.

Grey doesn't take his green eyes off the mountains. "You'll know it when you see it."

Well, that's certainly helpful.

We tread over rubble in silence. I chew my lip, gazing back up at him again. "What are you looking for?"

He clenches his jaw. "Loose rock."

Why do I get the feeling he is lying? I go to scold him and demand that he tells me the truth until my gaze falls upon a cave. There's light emanating from inside, and I walk over like I'm under a spell.

Pretty, shiny light.

Grey steps in line behind me, leaning down to whisper in my ear. "Don't go wandering off alone."

I reach up, placing a finger on his chiseled lips. They feel as smooth as stone. "Shh. Can't talk now. Must see the shiny..."

He groans above me, but screw him. I will get my shiny.

Finally, I arrive at the mouth of the cave, my jaw hitting the ground. It's a sword. The shining silver hilt pokes out from a gleaming rock of granite, and I swear it's glowing. Its pulsating light draws me closer, lighting up the whole cave, and I can't believe it.

I'm just like one of the characters I read about in books. I am King Arthur, finding the sword of Excalibur. The one that made him king.

And now it's my turn. Belle, from that little town with all those little people, will finally get her taste of real adventure, and a giddy, childish sensation thrums throughout my body, giving me life.

I've been waiting my whole life for this.

Steps have been carved into the granite, and now I ascend the rock, standing before the Sword of Vitality. This blade will give me unsurmountable strength, but it's not the prospect of superhuman power that tempts me. It's the sweet taste of adventure.

I'm the storybook hero, finding her call to adventure, and I can do this; I can wield that sword without losing my soul. I will not succumb to the Abyss.

I will prove that humans are worthy.

Grey watches me in awe, his green eyes wide, and why is he looking at me like that?

"What?" I say.

He sighs, shaking his head. "You just looked so... regal... noble, for a moment."

I scoff. I'm not sure what that's supposed to mean, but I can't believe this moment is finally happening. I finally get to be the hero I always wanted.

Time to save humanity.

Rubbing my hands together, I reach forward and wrap my fingers around the hilt. A shock runs up my arm, but I never let go. I need to seize this opportunity.

Alice depends on me. My father depends on me. The whole human world depends on me.

Taking a deep breath, I count to ten and pull the sword from the stone. It slips out with a metallic shink and my heart skips in excitement. Then I open my eyes, meeting my own startled reflection inside the steel.

I seem to be glowing. My hair whips in the wind behind me as the blade fills me with superhuman strength, and now all I can focus on is the sword.

It's the center of my very universe, and then it speaks to me in a soft female voice. *"Well, it looks like I finally found you. It's been a long wait, Belle."*

My eyes pop. "How... you talk?"

I turn the blade around in my hand as the sword laughs, and the hair stands up on the back of my neck. What is happening?

"That I do, and it appears you are here at last. Finally, someone worthy."

Worthy? Me? I don't understand. This sword is supposed to be making me hungry with power right now. I should be smashing rocks, getting high on all the superhuman strength, but I honestly don't feel any different. I'm just the same Belle but with a sword.

"You only seek my power to benefit others and not just yourself. Therefore, that makes you worthy. It may seem cliched, but trust me... your kind are rare, Belle. Very, very rare..."

The sword sighs and I can't believe this. I have a talking sword.

I glance down at Grey smugly and his knowing smile says it all.

It looks like I passed the second test.

Unfortunately, my happiness is short-lived when the cave starts to rumble, and I rush to Grey's side. He grabs a hold of me instantly, ready to fly me to safety, but then a rock falls down on him and traps his wing.

"Grey!" I shout, dropping to his side. He hisses in pain as I try to roll the rock off his wing, and to my surprise, it moves. Where did the strength come from?

The sword pulsates in my arm, and how could I forget? I have been gifted with superhuman strength. Now I am as strong as one of my monsters. Yet I will use that strength to help others.

As is my way.

Grey stumbles to his feet, stretching out his mangled wing, and it looks as if we won't be going anywhere now. We're going to have to escape on foot.

"Quickly, out the cave."

We rush out before we're caved in, and what the hell was that? An avalanche? That's when my gaze lands on the giant serpent slithering down the gorge toward us.

The king sure kept this one quiet.

Grey speaks up at last. "The keeper of the Supreme Mountains. We passed into his territory, and now he's pissed."

As if to amplify Grey's comment, the serpent opens its mouth and hisses, and my heart cleaves in two when I spy those fangs. Crap. I'm really in over my head.

I do have the sword, but I have no experience.

"Don't worry, Belle. I will guide you," the sword says, and I guess I have no choice but to trust her. She seems to think I am worthy, so I will throw my life in her hands.

The serpent is getting closer. Grey tries to shield me with his undamaged wing, but I push him aside and ready my stance.

I will strike the moment that beast gets within two feet. And then I will go all medieval on his ass.

Finally, the snake arrives, coiling its body as it readies its head to strike, and that's when I jump and lop off its head. The beast's head falls on the ground beside me, almost triple my size, and I gaze into its giant yellow eye.

It blinks in confusion for a few moments, but then when its brain finally runs out of oxygen, it shuts its eyes and finally dies.

Holy hell. I actually killed that thing on the first strike? The sword wasn't lying when she told me to trust her, and now I gaze down at the blade in wonder.

"That was a pretty close call," I tell her.

She laughs in response. *"Yes, but I knew you could do it. Always have faith in yourself, Belle. You'll be amazed at what you're capable of when you put your mind to it."*

Still, I just never thought that I would cut the head off a giant snake. I guess I should be smug, but I'm worried that the sword will stop thinking I'm worthy. She doesn't seem to hold any qualms though, and now I glance up at Grey and smile.

He looks at me as if I'm a goddess, and I step back. "What's with that look?"

Grey heaves a sigh, wincing as he tries to adjust his wing. "Nothing. I just can't believe how lucky I am. How lucky we all are. You're amazing, Belle. I would fuck you right now, but my wing's hurting like a bitch."

I step toward him, assessing his wing. Sweat drips down his face, and we have to get that thing looked at. While I'd love nothing more than to fuck him next to the head of the serpent that I just killed, we have to get him back.

The ache in my core has dulled now, but I still have the urge to be filled. The sword has helped to relieve the sensation, but I can't help but want to fuck.

We're alone in this gorge. No one would hear me scream.

But we need to get him back.

I'll get my sex later.

Grey takes my face in his hands and kisses me so passionately, I melt into a puddle at his feet. The ache returns and now my legs throb. Sweat drips down my face, and I'm hot all of a sudden.

My monster reaches his hand down, pressing his finger to my folds, and I shudder beneath his touch. Then he whispers into my ear. "I promise, sunshine. When all this shit is over... we'll fill you with our cocks."

And I'm looking forward to it. This land has made me even hornier than usual, but I can't let it distract me.

The king is waiting after all, and I have a new sword to show off. And don't forget a giant serpent's head too.

Chapter Sixteen

Nero

Well, here we are once again. Belle has proven herself to our uncle, and the big ugly troll is losing his patience.

She has managed to pass two of his challenges now, and each time she has exceeded his expectations. When Grey came in hauling that giant serpent's head into the throne room, getting its blood all over the clean, polished floor, she was practically glowing.

Also, she has a new sword too, and I see it has granted her its power.

Our mate really is a sight to behold, and I have never met a woman like her. She truly will lead us into victory.

No, not *my* mate, but my brothers' mate. Belle is not mine. I rejected her all because I didn't want to get my heart broken again. But I can't help but fall for her when I see her standing before my uncle's throne, wielding that bright, shiny sword.

It appeared Belle was the one the sword had been waiting for all this time. It deemed her worthy, and I couldn't be more proud of her. While I may not want to claim her as my mate, I'm still going to cheer for her success.

After all, her successes are mine too. Both the monster and the human races benefit from Belle winning that sword. After all, it may just help when it comes to defeating the darkness.

It grants the wielder unsurmountable power, and since Belle's intentions are pure, it has offered up its services to her. She doesn't appear to have any superhuman strength just yet, but I can't deny that she's radiant.

She has never looked more beautiful. I just want to go over and sweep her up in my arms, kissing her perfect elfen nose, but we have an audience.

Also, I already made my bed, and now I have to sleep in it. I don't think Belle would even want me after all the times I have rejected her. While I was trying to avoid getting my own heartbroken, in the process, I only went and broke hers, and I'm such an asshole.

I deserve to rot.

At least Alice has started to perk up. She regards Belle with the same awe as my brothers, and she truly does look like a goddess right now. That woman right there is going to make a difference, not only in her own world but ours too. Maybe even beyond. There could be infinite worlds out there for all I know, and maybe little Alice's *Wonderland* does exist after all; a world of pure madness and chaos.

Our uncle is frothing at the mouth as he sneers down at Belle, and do I detect a little bit of fear? Maybe he is realizing his mistake by refusing to help her in the first place.

By putting her through all these trials, she is only proving her worth. It appears my uncle expects her to fail since a lesser person would have caved right about now.

But not our Belle...

"So," Belle says, slipping her new sword into a scabbard around her belt. "I completed the challenge, and not only did I pass and kill a giant serpent, but I got a new, shiny sword too. Have I proven that humans are worth saving yet?"

The king bears his teeth, and if looks could kill. We have to tread carefully here, and not let Belle push his buttons too much. Our uncle is a merciless monster; it's surprising he never had us all executed on the spot.

Perhaps he just wanted to keep us alive long enough so we would see our mate fall victim to the Abyss, and it truly would be a fate worse than death. But each time, Belle has proven him wrong.

"Don't get ahead of yourself now, Isabel Hardgreaves. If there's one thing that you humans all have in common, no matter how pure your intentions may be... you are all controlled by your emotions. How easily you all cave. I'm not surprised humans are finding themselves trapped here. Such weak creatures indeed."

Belle balls her fists. "We are not weak."

Our uncle sneers. "No? Then if that is the case, let's see how you fare against the *Void*."

My heart cleaves in two, and I gaze at each of my brothers. Enzo closes his eyes, and Grey clenches his jaw. Madoc flexes his muscles, looking ready to embed his knife in our uncle's throat.

The Void is the last stop in the Abyss. It's a pit of darkness where light seizes to exist. A black hole that sucks away human emotions slowly and gradually until they shrivel up and die.

No human has ever survived. It's as our uncle said. One thing all humans have in common; they are, indeed, governed by their emotions. I should know. I'm a monster. I've exploited many a human emotion myself.

My area of expertise: Envy, and it truly is an ugly emotion. Probably the ugliest of them all.

The things it has driven the humans to do. I saw it with that creature Gustave. Humans always want what they don't have, and it truly will be the downfall of them all.

The darkness has just sped up the process.

Belle's skin blanches, and for the first time since she entered the courtroom, she truly looks terrified.

I sigh, stepping up beside her. I place my clawed hand on her shoulder, and hope returns to her eyes when she meets my violet pair. If there's anyone who can help her survive the Void, then it's me.

The king of heartbreak.

It's time to go to the Void.

Chapter Seventeen

Belle

The Void. It sounds like something straight up from a horror movie, and my nerves tremble as I embark on the brave trek with Nero. The Void is located at the edge of the Abyss, a place where dreams rot and die.

It's not like the fringes where my mates took refuge for the last one hundred years. The only thing you have to fear there are the wraiths, but the cloying atmosphere here makes me want to double over and eject the contents of my stomach.

This will be my greatest test. The Void sucks all the joy and merriment from the human until they are nothing but a shell, and I stop, wrapping my fingers around the hilt of Vita.

That's my new nickname for my sword—short for vitality. But will she be enough to give me strength?

I have to hold onto hope; that's all I can do now. At least I'm not alone. I have Nero with me, just like I had Madoc and Grey for my last missions, and I'm so grateful.

I'm still not sure where we stand. While I do find him extremely attractive, I keep my distance, not wanting to overstep any boundaries. He has made his feelings perfectly clear; he does not want to pursue me like the others have, but he is still willing to help me defeat the Void.

If only there was a way to show him how grateful I am, but we tread to the edge of the Abyss in total silence. I'm not sure what to say. I'm too nervous to talk, but I've never been a fan of long stretches of silence.

I suck in a breath. "Nero..."

He glances my way, and his violet eyes seem to incinerate me. I quake in his presence.

Shit. Kind of dug myself a grave here, but I lick my lips, and he tracks the movement with his purple eyes. I know he wants me too, but he keeps his distance.

But I don't want him to; I want him to have his way with me. I want him to make me feel dirty and remove the dull ache from my core.

"Yes," he says.

I sigh. "Thank you for joining me on this mission. I couldn't have done it alone."

He stiffens, and another tense silence trickles between us. What do I say?

"You're welcome, but... I'm sure any of the others would have been willing to help you too."

They would have, but none would have helped me like he could. I think he truly understands what it is to grieve. He has been through a lot in the past, but he just can't find it in his heart to fall in love with someone who he may have to let go of one day.

Who knows what will happen after all this; who knows if I can even save us all? I always believed that it was best to live in the moment, but I have to respect Nero's choice.

Finally, we arrive at the edge of the Abyss, and my stomach drops to the ground. Holy mother of black holes.

It's like we have reached the very edge of the universe itself. There is nothing but a black hole swirling beyond the precipice, and the last thing I want to do is go in there.

Will I even come back out? How the hell am I going to survive this?

Nero peers down once again, and I spy the rope in his hands. He ties it around my wrist. "So you can find your way back out. When it all gets too much, I want you to tug on the rope."

"Wouldn't that be cheating? You heard what the king said."

He growls, and his eyes burn bright violet. "Fuck the king. If he doesn't like my rules, then I will personally see to him myself. If you thought Madoc was insane, Belle, then wait until you see what I'm capable of."

I swallow audibly. I'm not surprised; the quiet ones always shock you the most, but I'm still not sure if the rope will be enough. I have to prove humans are worth saving, so I can't cheat. I need to do this the proper way.

"Belle... listen to me..."

He places his hands around my shoulders, and now I can't look away from those swirling pools of violet. They suck me in like black holes in their own right, yet instead of misery, they only bring me joy.

"You will not survive in there. No human has ever made it out of that void. So, screw being honorable. Do what you can to survive. Just willing to go in there is brave enough. And if our uncle

doesn't like it, we will kill him. It's been long overdue. I have my suspicions after all, and I know my brothers can sense it too."

I cock my head. "What suspicions?"

His eyes give a manic flash, and the expression shoots straight to my core. Damn, he looks hot when he does that, and there's no denying the psycho beneath that veneer of perfect calm.

He really wasn't lying before. Whereas Madoc is all fiery, burning madness, Nero is as sharp and cold as ice.

I nod, turning to face the void. Yet before I take a step toward the black, swirling mass, Nero presses me close to his chest, taking my breath away with a kiss.

His tongue slips inside my mouth as I melt into his kiss, closing my eyes, and all at once, the void vanishes. It's just the two of us now and I could stay this way forever.

But needs must. I have to go into the Void. Otherwise, the king will refuse to help me, and we will have no choice but to usurp him. He is not fit to sit on that throne, and Nero is right.

There is something awfully suspicious about him.

Finally, he lets go, and now he watches my back as I enter the black void, bracing myself.

As I step toward the giant black hole, a shiver runs up my spine. I shudder. So cold. My breath clouds before me, but so long as I remain strong, I will not be defeated.

Finally, I step inside the Void, and darkness envelopes me at last.

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I can't see, hear, or sense a thing. Darkness surrounds me on all sides, making my chest tight, and I forget how to breathe.

So lonely, and so desolate. I don't think I will ever make my way out again. I'm going to die here. But then a small tug on my wrist alerts me to Nero's presence, and I gain the courage to go on.

I've got this; I can face whatever horrors await me inside the Void.

They say it is a place where dreams cease to exist, and then all that is left is misery. You become a human shell, losing the will to live, and I refuse to buckle.

So I keep going on, wondering when the darkness will end. The ground beneath me feels spongy, and when I reach my hand out, nothing. It truly is a void.

There comes the sound of voices next, and I peer into the distance. Several shapes loom into view, and ice shards prick my insides.

It's my mom and dad's bedroom from our old house. And my mom is lying on top. She's sick. The voices come from my father and the doctor.

"It's... not good news, Mr. Hardgreaves..."

My father's face crumbles, making him look ten years older, and I block out the rest.

The Void is showing me my mother's death. Right up until the time she was diagnosed, and then up until the day she died. I can't do this. I go to tug on the rope, but I don't want to chicken out just yet. I've barely even started.

Fair enough, Void. If that's what you want. Show me your worst.

More and more images flash through the darkness, and now I watch as my once young, beautiful mother fades away. Tears slip from my eyes, and I reach up, wiping them away.

Then her funeral plays out and by the time they bury her casket, I'm a weeping, crumbling mess. I fall to the ground and sob, and the sorrow is all too much to take.

It sucks me right in like a void, draining me of happiness, and now all that is left is hopelessness.

I should have left when I still had the chance. I can't even find it in me to stand. All I'm reminded of is the misery and despair that is life. What's the point in fighting the darkness? Heaven knows it's what we all deserve.

We're a toxic race who only hurt each other, and there truly is no hope for humanity. The king was right.

Humans are beyond saving.

Something pulses beside me, and I glace down. Vita is speaking to me.

I stand, pulling her out of her sheath, and her voice echoes through the Void and beyond.

"Don't lose hope. You're stronger than you realize. Keep going, Belle. There's something beautiful beyond the Void."

Beyond the Void? How is that possible? There's nothing beyond misery and despair. We're at a dead-end here. Trapped. No way out. The only thing we can do is give up until we're numb.

No more pain, no more sorrow. I'm starting to see why no one survives the Void. The promise of Nothing is just too sweet. To be relieved from the overwhelming despair.

I want to be numb. A husk. And to give my soul to the Abyss.

But life beyond the Void? Is it possible there truly is something there? It seems impossible. The feeling of being suffocated is just too much.

But just like the promise of adventure, it calls to me, and now I grip tight hold of Vita and rush forth. I don't care if I fall right off the edge of the world, I won't stop.

The Void can go and kiss my ass. It won't make a zombie out of me.

I'm a fighter, and I will rid the world of darkness.

"That's it. Keep going. Don't stop," Vita encourages.

Even though it feels as if I am wading through a pit of tar, I don't stop. Even though all the air has left my lungs, and the cold seeps into my veins, I go on.

The light at the end of the tunnel? Is it a myth? Well, even so, I will create light.

Fuck misery and despair. I'm going to seize my happiness.

I'll never give up.

With a loud battle cry, I lift my sword in a wide arc and slit it through the Void. It tears through the darkness, creating a rip in time and space, and light burns my eyes.

It's blinding, but I keep tearing at the darkness, and the Void shakes around me. It dissolves and then with a final slash, I finally chase it away.

Light explodes everywhere, but I don't look away. I keep my eyes peeled forward, and I can't believe it.

Beyond the Void there is light, and it's the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.

Vita speaks to me once again. *"See? What did I say? Remember, darkness is temporary. But if you give it power, it will only consume you. I know it's easier said than done, but that was why I chose you, Belle. I knew you would be the one to lead the world to light."*

I smile as grass spreads beneath my feet. Flowers sprout up everywhere, and now I gaze across an endless field of green. The sky is dazzling, and the sun shining, and what is this place?

Heaven?

I hear voices next, peering around.

I'm not the only soul here. There are other humans, like me, ones who must have given in to the Void. They look as if they all just woke from hibernation as they get to their feet, and judging by some of their outdated clothes, some of them have been here centuries.

I spy a World War I soldier, and a woman wearing a dress from the 1800s. There are several people from my era too, and every single one of them looks at me in wonder.

I freed them from the Void. And now they regard me like I'm some hero, and maybe I can save humanity from the darkness.

I will find the light at the end of the tunnel.

Chapter Eighteen

Enzo

Belle returned from her lastest challenge triumphant, and I have never been more proud to call her my mate.

Maybe being banished was a blessing in disguise because it led us straight to Belle in the end. I can't even imagine my life without her now, and she truly will be the one to save us.

It even looks as if she conquered my little brother, and I'm proud of Nero. Finally, he has learned to move on and find happiness again.

But I don't think he has anything to worry about with this one. Belle is not quite like other humans, and now that she possesses the Sword of Vitality, it will grant her immortality.

Now we will never have to bear the pain of losing her to old age.

I don't even think Belle is aware of the power that lives inside her. It was there all along. From the day she came to our castle, preparing to sacrifice herself for her village, and from the day she returned to us and broke the spell, the sword just amplified it.

She truly is the noblest being who ever lived, and I would quite happily bow down to her and call her my queen. She *is* our queen, and it's about time my uncle got knocked down a few pegs.

He has ruled for far too long, and it is time for a new era. An era of Belle.

We all felt it the moment she shattered the Void. Where there was once darkness, now there is light. Not only did she save herself in the process, but she rescued the other humans who had been trapped there for centuries too, and the way they all regarded her as if she was a queen, no, a *goddess,* touched me.

That girl is going to make a real difference, and I know she can defeat the darkness. She just has to believe in herself first. Luckily, the sword will help guide her.

The king looks at his wit's end, and there's no mistaking the desperation in his eyes. He knows he is losing the battle. Even some of his councilmen are starting to look at him suspiciously, and it won't be long until they all lose faith in him.

I had my own suspicions about him too, but I was too polite to accuse him of anything. He really did disappear for a while back in the human world, and I wonder...

What was he up to?

Belle is visibly glowing. Her skin, hair, and eyes radiate with light, and I've never been more in love with her. She is the woman of my dreams, a true work of art, and I just want to bow down to her.

Also, there's an odd scent about her now, and my nostrils flare, trying to distinguish it. She always smelled pleasant, like roses, but the scent has strengthened. There's also the distinct smell of a new book.

Has the sword given her a new signature scent? The essence of Belle? It's alluring, and it makes me want to put my seed inside her.

Everyone at court regards her with awe, and I try to rein in my lust, keeping my wits about me.

No wonder my uncle is losing his nerve. Belle's power and scent radiates off her in waves, and his time is almost up. His reign of terror will soon be over. Ever since he defeated us, the Abyss has fallen into chaos.

Too many humans are giving in to the darkness, and now we have a surplus amount of lost souls wandering the Abyss. The wraiths are multiplying by the dozen, and even the monsters are feeling the mounting pressure.

We always thrived off negative human emotions. I always exploited their feelings of pride, but there aren't too many prideful humans around anymore. Humans are becoming less smug, less cocky as the days go by.

I'm simply starved.

But even Grey is starting to feel the effects. His emotion was fear, but there's just too much fear these days. It's overwhelming him.

The king speaks up. "Well, well, it appears you only went and proved me wrong, Isabel Hardgreaves. It seems humans truly are worth saving. You even managed to save a couple of hundred in the process. Well done."

His voice is mocking, yet Belle still gushes with pride. While it's an emotion I usually feed upon, with her, it's noble. One she has earned through hard work. I only ever exploited the toxic kind of

pride. Like the man who's too afraid to admit that he needs help because he has too much pride or the woman who can't tear her gaze away from the mirror.

The king rises from his throne, stepping down the steps, and my gut clenches when I spy his sharp teeth. "However, let's see how you fare in a final challenge. Isabel Hardgreaves, I challenge *you* to a fight."

There come several gasps. Madoc and Grey look ready to rip our uncle to pieces, but Belle's confidence reassures me. She's got this. If she can defeat the Void, then she can certainly defeat the king.

However, I'm shocked to my very core when Belle makes her bold announcement. "Deal. And the winner gets *your* throne."

Total silence spreads through the court. Belle just challenged our uncle for his throne, and it has sent shockwaves through the entire room.

Even the king looks speechless, and for a moment he almost seems to call it off, but he doesn't want to look like a coward in front of his court. Also, he was the one who challenged her.

To back away from a challenge that he instigated would be a real knock to his pride, and I know a lot about pride. He would not only lose the faith of his subjects, but he would be humiliated by a simple human woman.

I glance down at young Alice beside me and smile. The girl looks terrified for Belle, but I try to reassure her.

"Don't worry, Alice. Belle has got this. You will be free in no time."

She peers at me with those blue eyes, and there's no denying the hope.

Belle truly is a testament to her race. That's the first bit of light I have seen in the young teen's eyes ever since she arrived, and I know Belle will be able to defeat my uncle.

It looks as if he was never prepared to help her after all, and I'm looking forward to witnessing his downfall.

If only he had offered to help her from the start. But of course, he has too much pride.

Too much pride can be a toxic thing after all.

Chapter Nineteen

Belle

So it has come down to this.

The king has challenged me to a one-on-one fight, and I suppose I should have seen this one coming. He's nothing but a shark, and I will take great delight in cutting his head off.

Yes, I'm going straight in for the kill, even if it gets *me* killed in the process. I am going to execute the king, but I think his court will have a change of heart once they hear what he has to confess.

This son of a bitch had a hand to play in the darkness that has now spread through my world like a plague, and now he will pay. And when I am done with him, I will stick his head on a pike as an example for the others.

Do not mess with humanity. Because we will bite back.

Okay, that was a little dark and terrifying, but what can I say? The darkness is warping my mind.

The king steps down from the throne and circles the room. My mates reach out for me, but the guards hold them back. Madoc looks ready to combust, and I can hear him snarling and cursing, but then a guard hits him in the stomach, and he goes silent.

I clench my teeth, keeping my eyes on my opponent. I will deal with the guard who hurt my mate later. Right now, I have to deal with this current threat.

The king doesn't even fight with a weapon. He has chosen his claws instead, and I have to calculate my steps carefully and not get distracted. Sure, Vita has granted me insurmountable power, but I'm still rusty with my techniques.

I spent my years reading books, after all. Not learning swordplay.

Although I'm pretty good with a gun, I lost my rifle back at the wraith forest. No doubt some twisted wraith will use it as a prop on some poor human who has a fear of guns.

The king lashes out with his claws, and I jump back, using the flat of my blade as a shield. If only I had a real shield.

"Focus now, Belle. There is a way you can use his strengths against him. Sure, he has the upper hand, but time and time again, he has underestimated you."

That's true. Vita is right. When I first came to his court, looking for help, he only laughed at me, and he even threatened my mates. He expected me to fail on the first mission, but I proved him wrong.

He really does think little of us humans, looking down his nose on us, and I'm not surprised he fucked with us all. I wonder what he did to make the darkness spread. How many supporters he had, and how easy it was for him to infiltrate our emotions.

I saw what happened to Gustave once he got a taste of Madoc's power. Most humans cave, but that creature was fueled by such ferocity, and I think I know exactly what the king did.

The king turned humans against each other, hence why the darkness spread like a virus in a matter of years. Humans have always been toxic, I guess, and I learned that the darkness had always been there way before the monsters came to our world, but this ass just fueled it.

I always had a feeling there was some supernatural element involved, and the answer is all too clear to me now.

Was this the path Enchantress set me on? She wanted to see if it were possible for a human to fall in love with four monsters, creatures that most women would have balked from, but I ended up falling head over heels for all of them, and that's saying something. I was stubborn and always refused to have that typical, storybook romance.

I was no fairy tale princess or damsel in distress, but they still won my heart.

And not only do I owe it to my mates, but I also owe it to the rest of the human race. I will chase away the darkness, and I will return my mates to their former glory.

They will sit upon their thrones once again.

The king swipes at me, and this time he manages to draw blood when he slices at the side of my face. I grit my teeth, sweat dripping down my temple. There comes an eerie snarl from my mates, but I can't afford to lose my focus.

I wipe my face, glaring up at him. Sweat drips into my eyes. "You bastard... you were the one who infected the humans, weren't you? You're the one who brought the darkness and created all this chaos."

The king chuckles, swiping his claws once again, and I dodge his blows with the flat of the blade. I only know how to use my sword for defense, but I really need to get on the offense.

The fucker has backed me to a corner, literally. There's a wall at my back. My mates are livid and I can see that all four of them are now battling with the guards. I spy Nero ripping the arm from one, blood splattering his blue face. Madoc turns another into Swiss cheese with his knife, and Grey flaps his undamaged wing, knocking several off their feet.

I don't know where Enzo and Alice have gone, but hopefully, he has taken her away somewhere safe. I'm thankful. As my mate, his instincts should be to keep me safe, but he knows that I would rather he protected Alice.

She will not become this cunt's mate. Period. I will set her free.

She *will* return to the land of Wonderland one day. Of *course* it's real. I have learned that anything is possible, so long as you can imagine it.

Thoughts of Alice and my mates are what give me strength, and with one loud battle cry, I swing my sword, and a surge of power thrums through me.

Vita glows, her pulsating waves of light blinding everyone in the room.

I chop off the king's offending hands when he's distracted, and he backs off, yelping in pain. The whole court freezes, the guards, my mates, and members of the council. Some have vanished.

Well, it looks as if we have found the king's accomplices. They won't get very far.

I will find every monster who had a hand in helping the darkness spread.

The king's blood trickles from the blade, but I don't lose focus. Sweat is dripping off me in buckets, but I maintain my stance, holding my sword ready.

Vita continues to glow, spreading her power right through me, and I feel unstoppable.

But before I put the king's lights out forever, I have to know.

"Why did you do it? Why did you infect my race?"

He glares at me, cradling his injured hand, and he's losing blood. That's what he gets for underestimating me. I wore him out long enough, and now he has lost.

He makes a rasping laugh, and I peer straight into his puke yellow eyes. "Because... humans are scum. You call us the monsters, but I dreamed of the day when we could be free of you and achieve complete autonomy. Right to the point where we wouldn't even need you to breed anymore. We only exist because we are impressions of you. Your kind are the real monsters, sweet Belle. Never forget that. You're a true plague on that world, and one day, you will all meet your end. I just wanted to speed up the process."

So, that's why he did it? He wants his kind to be free of humans. They pretty much rely on us. They feed on us and they breed with us, and by extension, they are us. They're a reflection of all our nasty,

ugly traits, and he's right. Humans are monsters. When we're not destroying each other, we're destroying the planet and other creatures.

But I will change all of that. I will prove that there is still some beauty left to humanity, and I think I finally understand the quest that the Enchantress sent me on.

I will be the change we all need. I will fix our world and send us on the path of righteousness again.

We can start over.

I take a deep breath, closing my eyes. Then I open them again, meeting the king's fading yellow. "Thank you for opening my eyes, Your Majesty, but I will prove you wrong. I will save humanity from itself."

He cackles. "Humanity will never be saved."

I shrug. "Maybe not, but I'm still going to try."

With one final swing of my sword, I lop off the king's head at last, and it rolls across the floor. A frosty silence falls over the courtroom, so quiet, you could hear the sound of falling snow from a mile off.

But I did it. I defeated the king.

And now I am going to save humanity.

Chapter Twenty

Madoc

My mate drops to the ground, and I rush to her side. Her power well seems to have run out as the sword has stopped glowing, and now I swoop her up in my arms, cradling her to my chest.

Nero and Grey crowd me, checking her vitals.

"You did well, my beauty," I croon, nuzzling her head. "Amazing. You defeated the king and won back our thrones."

She makes an undiscernible sound, and I giggle, flicking my tongue out to lick her cheek.

"What are we going to do about them?" Nero says next, pulling my gaze away from my beauty. The guards stare at the king in horror, their metal-plated armor making it hard to see their expressions, and I growl, protecting my mate.

They will not get their disgusting hands on her.

The rest of the councilmen, the ones who never fled, cower in the shadows. I got the names of the ones who ran, and Nero and I will hunt them down later.

The head guard inches toward us. Nero and Grey step in front of Belle, hiding her from view. The guard drops his lance, holding up his hands in a peace offering.

"We surrender. You defeated the king, well, *she* did..." he points at the unconscious woman in my arms, and by instinct, I tug her closer. "She defeated him in a challenge, which makes her the new queen."

My eyes pop. Nero and Grey look equally as shocked. Of course. How could we forget? Belle had made the bet, and it looks as if she won her gamble after all.

Not only did she kill our piece of shit of an uncle, but she won his throne, and set us free. She even procured Alice's freedom, and now I cackle like a maniac, terrifying several guards. The council

members who didn't flee whimper in fear.

Belle is now our queen, and I can't wait to serve her. We may not have won our thrones back for ourselves, but with Belle in charge, I know we can all live happily ever after. Just like in the fairytales.

We just have to wait until she gets better. The last few days have taken their toll, and she needs to rest.

Even goddesses need to sleep every once in a while.

***

Enzo returned with Alice, and the look of joy on the young teen's face when she learned that the king had been killed made my heart soar.

My adopted human sister is now free. She burst into tears, and I took it upon myself to placate her, wrapping her up in my arms, and the way my brothers stared at me almost made me titter like a crazed clown again.

What? Do they think I can't be nurturing? Alice is my sister as much as she is Belle's now. We saved her together after all.

Belle rests on a bed in her new queen-sized suite. A coronation will be organized later, but for now, she needs her beauty sleep.

While she may be queen, we do realize that she may not wish to stay in the Abyss. Her father is still waiting for her in the human world, and I know she will want to return to him and banish the darkness from the world.

We just have to wait until she wakes. Whatever her decisions, I will support her. But I know in my evil, black heart that she will want to stay. After she has saved the world first, of course.

She stirs. All four of us rouse, crowding around her bed.

It's been several hours since she defeated the king. I shoved his head on a pike in her honor and placed it out in the courtyard. We ordered the guards to search the realm for his accomplices.

He had many, after all, and they all helped our uncle infect the humans and spread the darkness.

Alice sleeps in her own quarters for now. Two guards are on duty outside her door, ones we trust. We will take her with us to the human world, and then she can be reunited with her parents.

I throw myself down on the mattress beside Belle, taking her hand. "My beauty..."

She licks her dry lips, opening her eyes, and I peer into those sparkling hazels. "W-water..."

Grey hands me a glass, and I tip the water into her eager mouth. She's covered in sweat, radiating a strong, rosy scent with a hint of new book, and it appears my mate's unwell.

The Sword of Vitality lays flat by her side. It no longer glows with power, and my poor, sweet beauty.

Surely, she hasn't run out of power, right? Belle with regain her strength, and then we can all defeat the darkness together.

She rises up on the pillow, gasping for air, and we watch her attentively. She opens one eyelid, regarding us all suspiciously. "What is it?"

Enzo clears his throat. "We were just concerned, Belle. You have been out for a few hours. You do remember what happened, don't you?"

Her pouty lips pull up in a smirk, and my heart beats faster. So perfect. "I killed the king and won back his throne for you."

Wait, for us?

Enzo steps up closer. "While we appreciate the thought, Belle, it was *you* who challenged our uncle to his throne and won, and that makes you queen."

She shuts her eyes and sighs. "D-don't want to be queen. I... only made that bet so you four could take up the throne again..."

My heart warms with joy and I lean down, nuzzling my nose against her head. "We're grateful, my beauty... but I won't rule unless I get to rule beside you..."

Her eyes swivel to meet mine, and it appears we've all once again come to a collective agreement when it comes to Belle. We will retake our thrones, but we won't do it unless we're beside Belle.

Our rightful queen.

She parts her red lips, and I cast my eyes over her face. She's still sweating. Beads of moisture collect above her brows, and she's burning up.

Her rosy scent wafts my way, making me horny, and what is wrong with her? What's wrong with me? Why does my dick get hard when it catches a whiff of her pretty scent?

Enzo reaches down, pressing a finger to her forehead. He removes his finger and sniffs the sweat. "Just as I thought. Belle has gone into heat. I should have seen the signs. It happens to human women when they spend enough time in our world. That explains her addictive aroma. Monsters can't get enough of it."

My heart drops when I think of Alice alone with the guards, but then Enzo grabs my shoulder. "It's okay, Madoc. It only happens to mated females. Alice is safe."

I sigh in relief, trying to calm my erratic pulse. The thought of any beast in this world praying on that small, female human makes me feral with rage, and no one will ever touch her. Even when she's of age. I will rip their throats out.

She's my sister after all. I have to protect her. There is more I have to teach her with knives.

Belle opens her eyes, staring at Enzo in horror. "W-what? I have gone into heat? Like some bitch?!"

I snort at the curse word, but Grey slaps me across the head. "She means the dog, you idiot."

Still. My beauty said bitch. I love it when she curses. So sexy.

Belle gripes, rolling her eyes, and then she winces in discomfort, grabbing her stomach. "Fuck! I think I got cramps or something."

My poor beauty. I reach across to place my palm on her stomach, channeling my flames, and my fingers burn like embers. She sighs in relief when it eases the cramps.

Enzo exhales "It's one of the symptoms of your heat cycle, Belle. You need to mate. It's the only way to remove the pain."

Her hazel eyes bug at his words, and then her pupils expand. Her breathing increases as her rose scent saturates the air, and all four of us purr in response.

Our mate needs us.

"I volunteer!" I announce, shooting my arm up.

Grey snaps his teeth. "No!" His gaze falls on Nero and a smirk crosses his lips. "The honor goes to Nero. He hasn't claimed her yet, and it's about friggin' time he did."

I go to protest, but then I see my older brother's face. He shies away, and I find it hard to be mad and jealous when he looks so humble. I remember how grief-stricken he was when Jane died. He doesn't like to mention her name, but I think he owes it to himself.

Jane would want him to be happy. She was a lovely girl.

Besides, as our new queen, Belle will pretty much live forever. So he has nothing to lose.

Fair enough. I will give up my chance to be the one to relieve my mate's heat.

Nero will be the one to relieve her.

Chapter Twenty-One

Belle

Nero stammers, his head jerking back and forth between all three of his brothers. They only encourage him further, and he swallows visibly, gasping for air.

"I... I don't know... it's... been a while..."

Grey wraps an arm around his neck and gives him a noogie. Nero hisses, whacking him with his tail to get him off him. "Please. You used to be the *lady killer*, little bro. There's nothing shy about you. Stop being so humble."

The lady killer? My heart skips a beat and all four monsters stop and inhale as my scent spikes. It's a nice smell. Like my dream perfume that I always wanted growing up. Roses and that new book smell.

It's heaven. Even I want to lick me.

Madoc steps up to Nero, giggling like a maniac as he tosses Nero a playful punch. "You were the one who taught me how to use my tongue to pleasure the ladies after all."

Nero glares at him, his violet eyes almost incinerating. Madoc flicks his tongue out like a snake to prove his point. My pussy reacts and slick drips between my legs, alerting all four of them.

Grey stiffens, inhaling his nostrils. "You better hurry up, baby bro. Because if you don't, I will."

Madoc growls at him, but I only have eyes for Nero. I give him a pleading look, hoping he will take the bait and give me what I need. I have an empty, dull ache in my tummy and only *he* can relieve it.

There's no one else I would want.

Enzo, Grey, and Madoc can have me later.

Finally, Nero sighs, and now he unbuttons his jacket. He tosses it at Madoc then unzips his pants, throwing those at Grey, and my core clenches when I spy that neat eight pack.

He's slightly smaller than the others, more slender, and his body tapers around the waist. His skin is a delicious shade of purple, and I want to run my tongue across that chiseled torso.

My mouth is salivating.

Nero climbs onto the bed, aligning himself above me, and we gaze into each other's eyes. There's so much pain and sadness swirling inside those deep, purple irises, and I just want to kiss the pain away.

I lean up, placing my lips against his mouth, and I whisper in a voice that only Nero can hear. "It's okay, Nero. I got you. I will never leave you, promise."

His beautiful eyes sheen, and for a moment they remind me of a twilight sky. Stars shine inside them, and it's like gazing into the entire universe.

Nero kisses me back, and now he places himself between my legs, stretching my thighs. His length presses at my entrance, and I wrap my legs around his waist. Then I nod, giving him the green light, and finally, he slips inside.

The grooved edges of his shaft scrape against my walls, making lights flash before my eyes, and I throw my head back and gasp. He's not even all the way inside me yet, but boy, does he feel good.

My pussy stretches to accommodate his massive girth, and it amazes me how I can take all four of my monsters. They're huge, and I guess I always was made for them.

No other woman could handle these four ferocious beasts, and I suppose I really am different from other girls.

Nero buries himself inside of me at last, notching himself in place, and that empty hole has gone at last. Now I feel whole again, and I want to stay like this forever.

I don't want to break apart from him.

We will be glued at the hips.

"Look into my eyes, Belle," Nero whispers, and I meet those twilight skies again. Shooting stars streak across them, and I feel it then. I am in love with him.

All of them.

"I love you. All four of you."

Nero stills and his cock flexes inside me. I wince, sucking him tight, and I'm afraid to let go. Have I startled him?

But then he surprises me with a smile, and finally, I spy those sharp teeth. "I love you too, Belle."

Finally, he thrusts, and now stars streak across my eyes as he sends me into hyperspace. The more he pumps, the more I combust, and I clench around him, closing my eyes.

The stars explode, turning into supernovas.

Just when I think it's over, he reaches his tail around and rubs it around my back entrance, and I gasp. Fuck. That feels good. I want him to do that again.

He makes me come several more times, and combined with his hard thrusts and the feathery, ticklish sensation of his tail, I'm on fire.

I feel my strength coming back, and Vita starts to glow once more, pulsating beside me on the bed. It seems her power has synced with mine somehow.

Nero pulls out, and now Madoc and Grey scramble to go next. In the end, Grey wins, but they don't have to fight. They can have me at the same time.

Madoc rips off my dress, tossing it aside, and now he presses me to his chest. Grey gets behind me, running his calloused hands up and down my arms, and I shudder.

I love it when they sandwich me between them like this. Grey splays my legs for Madoc, and I rest my head on his chest, reaching my hands around his neck.

Madoc giggles like the psychotic idiot he is when his eyes get a fill of my pussy, and I swear flames dance inside them. It's like gazing into the windows of hell, but the fire only soothes me.

Whereas they would burn anyone else, they only warm me, making me feel safe, I close my eyes.

Madoc's tongue flicks down to my entrance, slipping deep inside, and I feel him all the way inside my uterus. I throw my head back against Grey's solid chest, mewling like a pathetic kitten. Then Madoc slips out, running his tongue all the way from my pussy to my breasts, and his saliva marks me.

Finally, he slips his dick inside and thrusts, using Grey as a wall. Grey whispers sweet nothings into my ear the whole time, his claw teasing at my nipples, and I come apart in his arms.

The moment Madoc slips free, Grey places me on his lap, and now he spreads his wing, shrouding the three of us. One of his wings is bandaged as it has finally received the TLC it needs, but he's still prepared to give me what I want.

Grey enters me from behind, and for the third time tonight, I am filled with a monster's giant, grooved cock. It rubs at my walls, making me shudder, and soon enough fireworks explode.

I clench around his dick, wringing him dry as he releases his own seed. All the while, Madoc licks his tongue up the length of my body, tasting my sweat, while Nero rubs a finger around my clitoris, kissing my neck. His tail matches the pace of Madoc's tongue as he brushes it across my breasts, making my nipples pebble.

Enzo watches us from the corner, and I open my eyes, beckoning him over.

I'm not completely relieved just yet. There's still one monster cock that needs to be inside me.

Enzo removes his clothes and stalks toward the bed like a lion cornering its prey, and now he pulls me away from Grey, laying down on his back. I straddle his hips as he gives me all the power.

I guess I am queen now after all. I won a throne.

Adjusting my position, I slide down on his cock and roll my hips. Enzo looks me in the eyes the whole time, and it's like gazing at the setting sun.

So orange, and so serene, he truly is magnificent.

The true king of beasts.

Grey, Madoc, and Nero don't stop playing with me. Madoc still licks and pinches at my breasts while Nero kisses my neck, brushing his tail up and down my spine. Grey nips at my ear, running his claw around my clitoris, and finally, I throw my head back and release.

I clench around Enzo's cock too, burying his seed all the way inside me, and I finally feel full at last.

The ache has gone, and the burning fever, but I'm ready to fight the darkness.

Bring it on.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Grey

We embark on our adventure to the human world, and I can't believe we are returning after all these years.

I almost missed it. Being so close to our main primary food source wasn't all that bad, but it was never home. Well, not until we met Belle.

I have learned that home is wherever Belle is now, and I look forward to ruling the Abyss beside her. That's if she wants to remain in our realm. We haven't actively discussed it yet, but whatever she decides, I will support her.

Her father is in the human world, and her friends from the village, so she would be sacrificing a lot by leaving. But there's no denying the bond that has formed between us.

The moment Nero gave in to her, it was like a link had connected the five of us, and I honestly felt it at that moment. We are going to be unstoppable.

The journey back to the fringes wasn't so bad this time. My brothers and I will no longer have to be doomed to live here, eating nothing but cooked wraith for the rest of our banished lives.

Now we can return to our castle, and sit upon our thrones. And I can return to my post as a battle strategist. Madoc can become general again, and Nero can return to being our spymaster.

Just like old times, but with the addition of our beautiful queen.

It takes several days, but we soon return to the fringes, gazing at that wall of shadow. My stomach clenches when I think about my mate embarking into that murk alone, and she must have been terrified.

Yet look how far she has come. She is simply radiant now and only looks upon that wall of darkness with a smirk on her face. She has faced far worse, like the Void, and our late uncle.

Alice shivers, standing behind Madoc. He protects her with his arm, and I shake my head. He's such a softie.

Nero smirks along with Belle, peering down at her, and there's no denying the love that sparks inside his violet eyes. I'm happy for him. He's been glum for far too long.

"I bet that murk has nothing on the Void now," he says to our mate and queen.

Her smirk stretches, and fuck does she look sexy when she makes that shit-eating grin. "You bet your ass."

They're both right. While still dark, the murk doesn't even hold a candle to the infinite darkness of the Void. It's more of a darkish brown than black, like two-day-old dishwater. Yet the Void is just that. Black.

Enzo sighs, peering back at all five of us. His gaze falls momentarily on Alice. "Well, are you all ready to return?"

Each of us nods, affirming our answer, and our unwitting leader takes the lead. He vanishes first, then Nero and I step in second. Madoc and Belle stand on either side of Alice, giving her a few moments. The teen takes a deep breath and finally, she steps inside.

The air is breathable in the murk. So she has nothing to worry about.

Belle pulls out her sword and channels her power, and the steel burns to life. It helps, but not by a large margin. While I can see a lot better than the average human, it's still a little murky. Belle said this was the hardest part of her journey. It was the fear of the unknown, the wandering, and the waiting for the murk to finally end. When she first stepped out of her father's gateway, this was where she ended up, and she said it seemed to go on for days, weeks. It was hard for her to keep track of time.

I still can't believe she faced this alone. Most humans would have crumbled here. Then if they're lucky enough to make their way out, they end up in the wraith forest facing off all their worst fears.

Hopefully, when we're done here, no human will have to fall victim to the Abyss again. While as a monster, it was always in my nature to be indifferent. But I was no different from those wraiths in the end.

I, too, exploited the fear of humans. But unlike them, I'm not some mindless being.

Truth be told, I don't think I want to exploit their fears anymore. Gustave had been the last straw. Having to peer into his mind and see the world through his eyes had been too much, even for a stone-cold monster like me, and I know Madoc is feeling the same way too. He has taken it upon himself to save humans now. He has even adopted Alice.

His main emotion was lust. Whereas Enzo's was pride. Nero's was envy.

I truly am the most despicable of all my brothers. Maybe I just need to find a new emotion to exploit. One that benefits the human.

Belle moves the sword around, taking the lead ahead of Enzo. Alice remains near the back with Madoc. I can sense that the kid hates having her back exposed, so I take the rear of our group and spread my wing, and the small smile she sends my way makes my chest feel fuzzy.

She really is a sweet kid.

What the hell is happening to me?

I hope her time in the Abyss has toughened her up, and now she can face her tormentors with pride. I could teach her a thing or two about fear and how to conquer it.

It's okay to be scared, but it's more impressive when one faces them.

I think I just finally realized my new purpose.

Belle draws a breath and we all look up.

"We're here."

That soon? How does she know? She said she had been walking through this murk for weeks, but we haven't even been in here an hour. Could it be possible that she was just walking in circles? I mean, she had nothing to go off, no signposts, and I grit my teeth.

This stupid murk. It had tricked her into making her think she was lost, but she got the better of it in the end. Just like she did the wraiths, the Void, my uncle, and every other creature she faced here.

The murk is a living thing in its own right, just like the Void was. It's breathing, feeding off the human's emotions, and I ball my fists, wishing that we could expel it somehow.

But what would be the point? We've arrived at our destination, and besides... this murk serves as a bridge between the human world and the Abyss. A buffer zone, if you will.

We follow Belle's line of sight, and we all finally see it. A doorway glowing in the distance

It's nothing but a square of light as it gleams through the murk. I squirm uncomfortably, and I know my brothers feel the same.

After all, we do not belong to that realm. We never did. But we are prepared to enter it once again so we can help our mate defeat the darkness.

But wherever she goes, we go.

Our mate.

Our queen.

I'm looking forward to ruling with her for the next epoch or two.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Belle

I inch toward the gateway, and I can't believe my eyes.

I will finally return to my father. He must have been worried sick. I reach up and wipe the tears from my eyes, gazing up at Alice. The gateway reflects in her big, blue orbs, and I spy the tears dripping down her own face.

We will get her home. As I promised her. Whereas the gateway may not open out into London, England, I will get her on a boat and back across the Atlantic Ocean. Somehow.

I bet her parents are worried about her, and maybe after this, they will start treating her better. Wonderland *is* real, and they should learn to appreciate their wonderful, imaginative daughter.

Lord knows we all need an imagination. It was the reason I read books growing up. They were my form of escapism, and now I reach across and take her hand.

"You ready to return home, Alice?"

She smiles, and the tears don't stop running down her cheeks. "Yes. Thank you, for everything, Belle. You were the big sister I always dreamed of."

I squeeze her hand, and the two of us share a moment. I hear Grey sighing in exasperation behind us, telling us to move it along and I roll my eyes.

I glance up at the gateway. The blue, swirling lights beckon me closer, and I take a deep breath.

Time to go home.

I'm coming, Dad.

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Bright fluorescent lights blind me once I step through the gateway, and I shield my eyes. My hand doesn't let go of Alice's the whole time as she, too, winces from the artificial light.

We had been in the murk for who knows how long, so it took us by surprise.

My surroundings soon come into focus, and a shuddery breath escapes my lips when I see we have stepped out into my father's underground lab at the university.

Tears slip from my eyes. I made it home to him.

I glance around at once, searching the room, and that's when I spy him behind the control panel. He has dozed off, and I smile, stepping down the stairs of the gateway.

"Is that your father?" Alice whispers.

"Yes. It's best we wake him gently. I don't want to startle him."

Alice stops and glances back at the gateway. "What about Madoc and the others? Aren't they coming through too?"

I follow her gaze toward the blue, swirling lights. I told them to wait on the other side after I went in. I wanted to give my father a moment to adjust to the arrival of four monsters. So I thought I could at least introduce him to Alice.

She's not so alarming.

Just as I step toward him, I wonder what day of the week it is. How long was I in the Abyss? Does time truly move quicker there?

I feel as if I have just come back from Narnia.

As I go to shake him awake, a door opens out on the side of the room, and there I spy a familiar face.

Grady.

He startles when he sees me and Alice, sloshing his coffee around, and it appears he just stepped out from a kitchenette.

"What the hell? Belle?!"

My father shoots up in his chair at the sound of his voice, his eyes flickering around. "Belle? Belle!"

His worn eyes find me, and there's no mistaking the bags beneath them. He probably hasn't slept much since I ventured into the gateway, and the guilt tears me apart.

I don't think I'll have the heart to tell him that I will be returning to the Abyss once I've saved the world. Where my monsters go, I go.

"Belle..." he whispers.

I wave. “Hey, dad. Long time no see.”

His eyes cloud with tears, and now he stumbles out of the chair, wrapping his arms around me.

“Finally... you’re back. I was so worried. I... was afraid you wouldn’t make it.”

Yet I did, and it’s hard to believe that I traveled to another realm, and not only did I conquer its worst aspects, but I became one of its five rulers.

I’m a queen.

Finally, he lets go, and his eyes fall on Alice. They expand. “Who’s this?”

I sigh, pulling Alice closer. “Alice. I found her wandering the Abyss alone.”

Understanding dawns in his eyes, and now he regards the poor girl with empathy as he reaches his hand out. “It’s lovely to meet you, Alice. Nice name.”

“You... you too, sir, and... thank you,” she whispers back, and I smile at the small exchange.

That’s when my gaze falls on Grady. He still stands at the doorway of the kitchen, holding his half-cup of coffee. Most of it ended up on his shirt.

“You’re... you’re back?” he mouths in disbelief, and I grin, stepping toward him. This man is like my second father figure. He took care of me when my own father vanished for six months, and he even taught me how to use a gun.

This man taught me about survival, and if it weren’t for him, then I don’t think I would have even made it through the murk. I would have perished long before I even reached the wraith forest.

I lost the gun he’d gifted me, but I exchanged it for another weapon in the end. Vita is all I could ever want and more. Sure, a gun always made me feel powerful, but it will never compare to Vita.

I really do have a lot of explaining to do, but first, it’s time they met four certain figures.

“Father, Grady... there’s someone I want you to meet. Well, *four* someones.”

Grady’s eyes pop in fear, and now he staggers back into the kitchenette. Yet my father nods and comes to stand before the gateway. “Very well. It’s been a while.”

His eagerness to meet the monsters who have turned my whole life upside down warms me, and now I take his hand and squeeze it tight. “Thank you.”

He returns my smile and now we both face the gateway.

Time for my father to meet my boyfriends.

Well, properly this time.

***

My father was strangely accepting of my mates. Whereas he was already acquainted with Enzo and Grey, he had never been formally introduced to Madoc or Nero.

They must have never crossed paths for the six months he'd spent at their castle, and I'm grateful. While Nero may not be so bad, I don't think meeting Madoc would have been good for my father's blood pressure.He's definitely something...

My mates will be nothing but shadowy figures again in this world, but to me, they're as clear as they were on that portrait I found in their castle.

I think Alice has started seeing them a little better too, and it appears once you form some form of bond with them, well, the more you see.

We drive down the highway toward the nearest city in search of the darkness, and there's no mistaking the storm clouds gathering overhead.

Alice rides shotgun while Grady drives. Meanwhile, I sit in the backseat between my dad and Enzo, and they talk about my father's work with portals.

Grey, Madoc, and Nero fly overhead in shadow form.

"It's simply amazing. I can't believe my theory came true after all. That Nobel Prize could have been mine."

Enzo chuckles, and he reaches across and pats my father's shoulder. "I'm sure you still will win, Monty, old friend. Belle will defeat the darkness, and then you can restore your world in no time."

My dad's eyes expand, and now he leans back in his seat as he envisions himself winning that Nobel Prize.

It had been his dream for a long time, after all.

Grady is tense as he drives the car, his fingers bone white as they grip the steering wheel, and it's obvious he hasn't quite adjusted to sharing a car with a monster yet.

I suppose Enzo does stick out like a sore thumb. There was only room in the car for one of them, and even then, he could barely fit inside. He's lucky Alice is so short as she had to pull her seat all the way up just to accommodate his legs. His horns tear into the ceiling of the car.

Grady taps the steering wheel. "So, um... you're just going to walk right up to the darkness and save the world. Is... that it?"

He's speaking to me, and I meet Enzo's orange eyes. I sigh. "Yes. I'm... more than equipped, after all."

“H-how? I’ll admit, you do seem... *different*, but still, Belle. How can you defeat that thing? You’re just a human. No one has been able to go up against it. Not even the military. No one.”

I scoff. Well, the military doesn’t have Vita, but I can understand his concerns. He does view me as a daughter, after all, and I have to respect that.

“It’s fine, Grady. I can do it. I know I can.”

I have yet to tell them of my extraordinary feats in the Abyss, but I will save that for another day. Right now my focus is on destroying the darkness.

I will undo the king’s evil and return my world to its former state.

I can do this. I know I can. Just one more obstacle to overcome. And then I can finally return home to my monsters and rule by their sides.

There’s a throne with my name on it waiting for me after all.

Alice makes a startled whimper next, and she points at something out the windshield. Grady is as equally horror-struck beside her.

We all look forward, and my heart drops to my stomach when I spy that billowing storm cloud in the distance. Well, at least that’s what it looks like.

Except it’s swirling and undulating, and it appears to be alive. Lights flash inside its mass, and I swallow when I realize it’s lightning.

We’ve finally found it. And already it has done so much damage. It destroys skyscrapers as it hovers over the city like an omen of death, and I close my eyes.

This will be my greatest foe yet.

Well, bring it on, I guess.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Nero

"Holy fuck..."

Madoc and I glance at our oldest brother as we fly toward the city. The darkness has truly spread through the human world, destroying towers and skyscrapers in its wake, and isn't this just our luck.

Not even we could defeat that, and I worry about our mate.

I suppose she did defeat the Void by herself, but this thing isn't alive like that was. This darkness is constantly evolving, fueled by the ugliness and hatred of humanity, and we have to stop it.

It's causing too much imbalance, and this will be a real test for me and my brothers. We're too used to causing this kind of toxic emotion ourselves, but never to such extremes.

We have to stop the humans from destroying each other.

"You ready, brothers? It won't be pretty once we reach that city," Grey says.

Even Madoc looks a little unsettled, and there truly is no hope for us. The maniac normally thrives off adrenaline and adversity, but not this.

The three of us brace ourselves as we fly into the city, Enzo and the others in the car a few miles behind, and the moment we enter the beast's lair, we stop.

Shit.

It's a warzone. Humans tear into each other with crude, makeshift weapons. Men in uniform try to hold them off, but they're outnumbered. A group pushes an army tank over, and it's pandemonium.

Never mind the darkness. How the fuck is Belle suppose to even reach it with this lot? There are piles of dead bodies, men and women covered head to toe in blood, and I've never been so disgusted in my life.

So this is what humanity all boiled down to in the end. It truly is sad, and for once, I could see where my late uncle was coming from. He made a point when he said humans were vile creatures and that he wanted us monsters to be free of them, but we know they can be saved. They're not all like this.

These are just some bad apples, but we can heal them too.

Just... how? Envy was always my thing. The last thing I want to do is fuel their hatred for each other. Grey's was fear, and a lot of these humans are acting this way because of fear, and then there's Madoc with his lust and insanity.

Yeah. It's best we don't fight fire with fire... unless...

I turn toward the dark, swirling mass overhead, and an idea sparks in my mind. That stormcloud is a byproduct of humanity's ugliness and hatred. The more they fight and kill each other, the stronger it grows. As if to punctuate my point, the blight in question roars, sending another tower crumbling down into the street.

Madoc swoops in and rescues several humans before the debris crushes them to death, and the poor humans have never looked more startled. They won't be able to see us. We'll just be shadows, like we've always been in this world. Creatures that lurk in the dead of night.

Their worst nightmare.

We have to stop the blight from spreading. But to do that, we need to get to its root cause.

Humanity. They brought this darkness onto themselves. They haven't seen the sun in years as a result of their corruption and we have to make them see that.

Just... how?

Envy won't help here. Nor fear or lust or insanity.

It's truly hopeless.

Our best bet is to weaken the darkness somehow while Belle sneaks in and destroys it.

The car pulls up at last, and Belle and Enzo jump out. The human driver, Grady, does a complete U-turn, getting the fuck out of the city, and who can blame him? He has an old man and a kid in his company, and he has to get them away, ASAP.

Enzo joins us once again, and there's no mistaking the sorrow in his eyes when he casts his gaze around.

These humans truly are beyond saving, and I almost don't want to bother. I spy a man dragging a woman away into an alleyway, and I dive in and throw him against the wall. He doesn't get up.

Some of them deserve this.

But there has to be some good apples here.

No one touches Belle. People avoid her as she walks down the street, heading toward the blight, and she's unstoppable. She glows with that raw power, looking like she just stepped out of the pages of a comic book, and people stare in awe. They even stop fighting.

She's a goddess amongst mortals. The Sword of Vitality gifts her with its power, the one that deemed her worthy. Two guys pause, dropping their makeshift weapons, and there's no denying their lust.

She was pretty hot before she received that power, but now she's ethereal.

And she's going to defeat the darkness.

Yet the moment she's out of sight, the people wake from their trance and return to their fighting, and it appears Belle's power only works at close range.

They return to the despicable beings they are the moment she's out of sight.

Enzo gathers us all together as we talk strategies and Grey is in his element. This was always his role back at our old court. We've fought many battles. We can fight one more.

"Brothers. Now is our time to really prove our worth and earn our thrones back for ourselves," Enzo says.

Madoc's eyes gleam like embers while Grey flexes his muscles, and it looks as if they are ready. I guess I am too. While we may not be able to cure these people like our mate could, we can still hold them off and weaken the blight.

The only reason why it's going so strong is because of their fighting. I bet it got a real kick out of that rapist I may or may not have killed earlier.

Well, time to win back our thrones.

We have to be careful. We saw what happened to Gustave after all. Our powers only fueled him, and the last thing we need is to give these people more ammo.

It seems we come to some mutual agreement, and we didn't even have to communicate. We've known each other our whole lives. Enzo pretty much raised me and Madoc.

Enzo flies down to the nearest human and wraps his tentacles around his head. The man stops, and I have no idea what passes through his mind or what images he shows him, but it's enough to distract him.

There are different kinds of pride, after all, and it doesn't always have to be toxic. Tears run down the man's eyes, and it appears our older brother got through to him.

“My son... my... my pride...” the man blubbers, and it seems Enzo found his true pride. Something the man was very proud of in his life that only purified his soul. Not tarnished it.

We have the power to manipulate human emotions any way we see fit. We just always preferred to feed off their negative ones.

Grey flies up to another human, and instead of showing them what they’re most afraid of, he shows them how they can conquer their fear, and I bet he got that idea from Belle.

Madoc brings out the sexual desires of two men who were fighting previously, and he turned their lust and violence into love. The men embrace, kissing, and my psycho brother cackles.

“Make love, not war!”

That just leaves me. The quiet one.

How the hell am I supposed to put a positive spin on envy? It’s an ugly, toxic human trait, no matter what. Man always wants what he can’t have.

So, do I make them realize what they do have?

I fly down to a woman and wrap my tendrils around her head, digging into her mind. She freezes instantly. She had a sister who she was always envious of. Not only was she prettier, but smarter too. Before the world fell into disarray, the sister had it all. A house, a rich husband, well paying job, three beautiful kids, while this woman worked a minimum wage job, struggling to make ends meet. Their parents always made her feel awful and compared her to her older sister, but now... the sister is dead.

I bet all those old, superfluous emotions the humans used to harbor for each other seem so trivial now. This woman may not have had it all in her previous life, but at least she’s still alive.

It’s like I’ve opened up a well inside the woman. I found who she used to be most envious of, but soon that envy turns to grief as she drops to the ground and howls for the sister she once had.

“I’m sorry, sis... I’m so sorry... I promise... I will turn it all around for you...”

Well, that’s a step in the right direction. It’s amazing how much power we truly have over these creatures, and honestly... I feel stronger than I did when I only exploited their negative emotions.

I took something like envy and turned it into something beautiful.

Humans will always be fearful, envious, and full of pride, but I think my brothers and I have found a way to cure these creatures long-term.

The dawn of a new era really is upon us.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Belle

I don't take my eyes off the darkness as I edge closer and closer, and soon I enter its midst. Now I'm standing right at the eye of the storm, holding up my sword.

The beast roars at my sudden intrusion, and the ground shakes beneath me. Next, it sweeps me up in its shadow, and the darkness seeps into my veins and consumes me.

This giant mass is a by-product of humanity's ugliness. And it's going to corrupt me just like it corrupted millions.

I'm blinded as the blight fills me with darkness, spreading through my entire bloodstream, and it's too much. All that hatred, all the violence, and I try to open my mouth and scream.

My scream is muffled next when the darkness pushes its way down my throat, filling up every fiber of my being, and I'm going to die. There's no way I could withstand this. This blight has been around for thousands of years, growing slowly in the background as humanity fought and killed each other, and there's no stopping it.

I truly am helpless.

I twist and writhe in the creature's grasp, and now all I can see is darkness. It's hideous, and I was a fool to think I could go up against this beast alone.

The screaming of thousands of suffering humans is enough to kill me.

A voice seeks me out in the darkness, and for a moment I think it's Vita, my sword. She's still in my grasp as I never let her go for a second, but even she's overwhelmed.

The blight is different from the Void. The Void was only made up of misery and despair. While still consuming, the blight is an accumulation of every toxic human trait, and now it has become a force of nature in its own right. It can not be defeated. It's the true devil.

I was an idiot to think that I could save us all.

“Belle...”

That voice again. It’s at the back of my mind. It’s hard to hear through the screaming and suffering of countless humans, but it’s there nonetheless, and now I focus all of my energy on it.

“I’m... I’m here... I can hear you...” I say.

“Good. I know you can overcome this, dear, you just have to hold on a little longer. Promise me.”

“Wait,” my eyes expand. “Mom?”

It can’t be. She died. I saw her casket going into the ground. I saw her life slowly slipping away as the ugly disease took her away from me and my dad, but how can I hear her?

Unless...

I knew there was more to this shitty world. My mother does live on somewhere. Whether it’s just inside of me, or she truly is a ghost whispering into my ear, I will take it.

She never left me.

“Mom...” I cry, and I can feel her smiling. She reaches out and caresses my face, wiping away a tear, and I’ve never been so happy.

I have her back.

“I love you, Belle. Now defeat the darkness. It’s getting awfully crowded up there...”

Up there? Where? Nevermind. I will do as she says.

So long as my mom has my back, I can do anything.

I cry out and swing my sword out, and the blade cuts right into the darkness. The blight screams, dropping me back to the ground, and I land like a cat on my feet.

I don’t stop. Again and again, I swing my sword, and the blight recedes, crying like a little bitch as I hack into its flesh. It’s mostly incorporeal, but my blade still finds something tangible, and soon the creature shrinks.

Vita shines like the sun, chasing away the clouds, and with one final battle cry, I throw my sword down and stab the entity in its chest. It’s nothing more than a stain now, a tiny, insignificant blotch on the tarmac, but it’s no match for Vita’s light. It fizzles away, flying up into the ether to never be seen again, and finally, it’s gone.

Light bleeds into my eyes, and it’s not coming from my sword. The clouds have cleared, and... I finally see blue.

At last, the sky. I never thought I would gaze at that brilliant azure again, and I can’t believe I did it. I can still feel my mom beside me and I smile, whispering, “Thank you for never leaving me.”

She smiles, even though I can't see, and then she vanishes. My heart breaks in her absence, and it hurts more than the first time she left this world, but at least I know she lives on in some form.

Even my father always believed. A man of science. It was the reason he got so obsessed with creating portals to other worlds. I truly think he wanted to find her, but it turns out he needn't have bothered.

She was with us the whole time.

Was it her who gave me strength in the Abyss?

Cries echo across the city, and every single person has stopped fighting to glance up at the sky. They stare, seeming to forget for a moment why they were fighting. Some cry and I spy several hugging each other. Some make out, and I wonder if Madoc had a part to play there.

It's just like the moment I freed the people from the Void. Light spreads through the world again, and a bird perches nearby on a piece of fallen debris, trilling a happy song.

Four figures come toward me, and they look as clear as they did in their portrait in the West Wing tower. Madoc rushes forward and scoops me up in his arms, swinging me around, and I can't believe I did it.

I saved the world.

It's time for a new era.

Humans can be redeemed.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Epilogue

It took some time to clean everything up. There had been similar riots in other cities all across the globe, and it appeared that the darkness's influence could even transcend across oceans.

The last thing I wanted to do was send Alice back to that island across the sea. It's not as big as North America, so that means there are fewer places to hide, but she had to return to her parents.

Besides, it all worked out in the end. The fighting really had stopped all across the world, and maybe we truly can start afresh.

I knew Alice and I would one day meet again, and she was more than willing to return to the Abyss for my coronation ceremony. Now that things seem to be back on track, my monsters and I have decided to finally make it official.

I am going to be Queen of the Abyss, and rule beside my mates for the rest of eternity. Alice was also accompanied by my father and Grady, and now they sit front row in the courtyard of the castle. watching with pride as Enzo places my crown on my head.

I have my own throne. It sits between that of my mates, two on either side, and I am looking forward to sitting there with them all beside me.

Things are not only going to change in the human world, but they are going to change in the Abyss too.

Well, if it can still be called an abyss. It's more of a haven now. My mates realized they got more out of making humans happy than miserable, and it appears their world is now founded on happiness rather than suffering.

I heard that the fruit in the Forest of Forbidden Fruit has all rotted now. The place where the Void once sat is now a mini paradise, and it's where humans go when they feel inspired.

Many artists and writers frequently visit there, a place that was once void of creativity. The Murk cleared up too, and the wraiths all died out. Some survived, taking on new forms, and now instead of fear, they feed off happiness. Alice went there the other day with Madoc, and lo and behold... she was back in Wonderland.

There are still some dark areas, but nothing will ever be one hundred percent perfect.

But you can bet your ass that I am willing to try.

The crown finally touches my head, and now I rise before my court. There are cheers everywhere, and my father wipes a tear from his eyes as I stand beside my mates.

They recently got their crowns back too, but they wanted this day to be all about me. They said I more than earned it after all.

It's my time to celebrate.

As the night wears on, and the festivities are in full swing, I receive a visitor at the door.

It's an elderly woman in a shroud, and she holds out a red rose. I take it from her hand.

"Please..." she begs. "Please take pity on an old lady and give her shelter..."

I raise a brow. She knows that I know it's her, right? That trick isn't going to work on me.

I smile, opening the door for her. "Why, of course, sweet old lady. There's always room for you in *my* castle..."

The old lady transforms before me at last, and there she is once again, the enchantress. She's still the most beautiful-looking woman I have ever seen, and she has nothing but a smile for me.

"Well done, Belle. You passed the test. You have proven that you truly are something after all. I knew you could do it."

Silence passes between us as she continues to hover outside the door. The others are celebrating inside, and I chew my lip.

This was all her doing, after all. This was the path she sent me on. First, she wanted to see if I could find it in my human heart to fall in love with four beasts, and then she wanted to see if I could be the one to rid the world of darkness.

Well, I more than proved her right, and I have the crown and sword to show for it.

I'm not even sure if I am human anymore, and without meaning to sound conceited, I may even be some form of goddess.

Vita, the Sword of Vitality, deemed me worthy, and it makes me wonder.

Were there worthy souls before me? There had to be. I know I'm not that special.

Again, I peer into the enchantresses' eyes, and she gives me a knowing smile. Vita pulsates lightly in her presence, and I gaze back and forth between them.

Hold on...

"You're the previous owner of Vita, I mean, the Sword of Vitality, aren't you?"

She grins. "Maybe."

Well, what a way to be cryptic, but I need answers. "Why did you send me on this path? Why me?"

She sighs, turning away from the door, and she motions for me to follow. We tread through the gardens of the castle, and we're surrounded by brightly colored flowers.

Life really has changed in the Abyss.

"Yes. I used to be human just like you once upon a time, Belle. I went by the name of Rose. Briar Rose. But my birth parents called me Aurora."

Aurora? Why does that name ring a bell? She does emit a pretty light, so it's only fitting.

She laughs, lost in memory. "Briar Rose was what *they* called me... when I was hiding from *her*..."

I stop. "Who?"

She sighs. "Just three faeries, two of who couldn't decide whether they preferred me in a blue dress or a pink dress for my wedding day, but that's beside the point. Belle, I set you on this path because I saw something in you. While I may not be the same human girl anymore, an ex princess..."

Hold the phone. Did she say princess?"

"... I still remember what I was like. You reminded me a lot of myself from that time. You had the same spirit. As the old keeper of the Sword of Vitality, it was my mission to find a suitable heir."

Her words sink in. So, she *was* the old keeper of the sword. Briar Rose, or Aurora, and now she has passed down the mantle on to me.

"Did you know that I would become queen?"

She shakes her head. "No, but I suppose it was to be expected once you won the hearts of the four kings, but I never thought you would win the throne for yourself. Pretty impressive. All I had to do was defeat a wicked fae with horns and banish her to the underworld, but you only went and exceeded my expectations. I'm proud of you, Belle."

I gush with pride at her words, and I still can't believe it.

She was human all along. Some human princess by the name of Aurora. But I still have questions. "So, what happens now?"

Aurora, or Briar Rose, as she prefers, grins at me. "Simple. You enjoy the time you have left with your loved ones and live a life you can be proud of. Then a day will come when you pass on the

mantle to another."

"How will I know who'll be worthy?"

She places a hand on my shoulder, and I have no idea how old she is. She appears to be my age, but when she speaks of faeries and princesses, I can imagine she has been around for a while.

She sounds like the characters I read about in books. Princesses who defeat dark faeries, and I definitely want to know more about her old life. But before I have a chance to ask her, she pushes me back toward the castle, ushering me inside.

"No, go on. Return to your mates. They're waiting for you."

I sigh, moving toward the castle again. I give her one last look over my shoulder, and she encourages me forward. Now I open the door and step inside, but when I glance back at the garden, she's gone.

Will I ever see her again? Who knows. But I will do as she told me to. I will enjoy the rest of my life with my monsters and cherish my loved ones.

And then when the time comes, I will pass the mantle onto someone else, and gift them the Sword of Vitality. It would have to be someone worthy of such power, and I'd be more than happy to take on the task.

But for now, I'm going to enjoy ruling beside my mates.

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For those who made it out the Abyss. This was for you.

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Come and join my reader Group Violet's Foxy Readers for updates on my books or sign-up to my mailing list!

Don't be shy... we don't bite. Well, Madoc might, but he's harmless...

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